

AMERICAN REPORTERS  
AND THE MEXICAN WAR, 1846-1848

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The Mexican War, 1846-1848, coming soon after the start of the penny press era, was the first major war to be reported extensively by American journalists. This study primarily examines the performance of American reporters in Mexico during the war period, the content and style of their articles, the various means used to transmit the news to papers in the United States, and the roles of the penny press and the political press in the war's coverage.

One of the main findings of the study is that the war was more extensively reported than previously recognized. Correspondence regarding the war's progress came to newspapers from three principal categories of writers:

(1) "special correspondents" assigned specifically by newspapers to travel to Mexico to report on the war's progress; (2) "occasional correspondents," usually former newsmen or printers who initially joined the army as volunteers and later had time to write to newspapers on an informal basis; and (3) "letter writers," members of the army who corresponded with political newspapers in order to promote or detract from the exploits of various leading military officers or units.

At least 11 individuals were considered "special correspondents" at various times during the war: George Wilkins Kendall, F.A. Lumsden, Christopher Mason Haile, D. Scully, Charles Callahan and John E. Durivage



of the New Orleans Picayune; John L. Freaner and George Tobin of the New Orleans Delta; John Peoples of the Delta and the New Orleans Crescent; Wm. Tobin of the Philadelphia North American; and John Warland of the Boston Atlas. Although the role of Kendall in reporting the war has been established, the present study indicates Freaner, Peoples and Haile also were important correspondents during this period. The New Orleans press, closest to the war zones, led the coverage of the conflict. Because newspapers of the day depended heavily on news from their "exchanges" — free copies of other newspapers — the reporting of the New Orleans reporters was widely reprinted throughout the United States. In addition to the influence their reporting had on American public opinion, Kendall, Freaner (using the pseudonym "Mustang") and Peoples ("Chaparral") all had national reputations by the war's end.

Although their writing on occasion reflected pro-Whig or pro-Democrat attitudes, the correspondents for the most part strongly supported America's involvement in the war and the concept of Manifest Destiny. They also empathized strongly with the army, which was relatively small and isolated in the interior of Mexico; reflected attitudes of distrust and bias against the Mexicans; and promoted and reinforced the popular war hero images of Zachary Taylor and Winfield Scott.

The study also explores the development and contribution of the "war papers," American owned and operated newspapers which Yankee journalists started in the American occupied areas of Mexico. These papers were an important source of the war's news and served the needs of both the troops at the front and the public at home. Before the war ended American newsmen established 20 war papers in 13 Mexican cities.

Also examined in the study are consorship and newspaper suppression during the war; patterns of transmitting the news from Mexico to the press at home; the development and utilization of the telegraph and other communication systems; the role played in the war by the Polk Administration paper, the Washington Union; and the response of the penny press leaders to the challenge of reporting the war.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTERS		PAGE
1	INTRODUCTION. . . . .	1
2	JOURNALISM IN 1846. . . . .	6
3	COMMUNICATIONS: HOW THE NEWS GOT THERE .	30
4	NEW ORLEANS PRESS . . . . .	52
5	OPENING BATTLES: VOLUNTEER LETTER WRITERS . . . . .	85
6	THE FIRST WAR CORRESPONDENTS. . . . .	104
7	AMERICAN PRINTERS IN MEXICO . . . . .	142
8	BATTLE OF MONTERREY . . . . .	156
9	THE LULL AT TAMPICO . . . . .	187
10	BATTLE OF BUENA VISTA . . . . .	206
11	SIEGE AT VERA CRUZ. . . . .	230
12	MR. BEACH AND MRS. STORMS . . . . .	261
13	BATTLE AT CERRO GORDO . . . . .	274
14	THE SUMMER LULL . . . . .	294
15	CONTRERAS AND CHURUBUSCO. . . . .	318
16	THE FALL OF MEXICO CITY . . . . .	332
17	THE YANKEE PRESS IN MEXICO CITY . . . . .	353
18	MUSTANG DELIVERS THE TREATY . . . . .	373
19	THE LEONIDAS HOAX . . . . .	394

CHAPTERS		PAGE
20	WITHDRAWAL PAINS AT MEXICO CITY. . . . .	418
21	THE LAST STORY . . . . .	435
22	NEWSPAPER SUPPRESSION AND CENSORSHIP . .	453
23	SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS. . . . .	471
	BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	481

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The Mexican War (1846-1848) was one of the highlights of the American expansionist period. Fueled by a variety of motives, the United States and Mexico confronted each other at the Rio Grande in April, 1846. An American invasion of its weaker neighbor soon followed. A year-and-a-half of sporadic fighting ended in September, 1847 when American troops under General Winfield Scott captured Mexico City, effectively bringing the entire country under United States control. Peace negotiations followed over the next nine months, finally concluding at the end of May, 1848 with the United States receiving the territory including California, Arizona and New Mexico, plus the boundary at the Rio Grande, as its share of the settlement.

The Mexican War occurred at a time of great expansion in American journalism — especially for the profession's newest form, the penny press. Starting with the New York Sun in 1833, the penny press had been spreading steadily through the 1830s and 1840s in the nation's fast growing urban centers. The country's communication system also had been increasing throughout the 1830s and 1840s, with more miles of telegraph, railroad, canals and highways being added every year. These improved communication conditions, plus the energy of the penny press

editors, combined to make the Mexican War the first war to be reported extensively by American journalists.

There has been no previous study of American reporters during the Mexican War. Various chapters in studies dealing with war reporting cover the Mexican War in superficial detail, but fail to develop the personalities involved in the coverage and the procedures they used in their reporting. This study attempts to close that gap. At least 11 major reporters were involved in some aspect of the war; two in particular, George Wilkins Kendall and James L. Freaner, made major contributions. This study deals in depth with the methods the various American reporters used, and the contribution they made to the general public's knowledge and understanding of the war's goals, progress and outcome. It also discusses the means the media used to convey the news from the battle fields and army camps in Mexico to the newspaper readers in the American population centers. Through the use of pony express, boats, stage coach, railroad and telegraph, the American newsmen were constantly able to reduce the period between the event's occurrence and its news report to the public.

Concurrently, the press improved the means of processing and publishing the news at home. High speed presses, better type setting procedures and greatly improved methods of selling and distributing the materials were developed during the war period. Although this study discusses these developments as they relate to reporting the war, it does not deal with them in depth.

The main thrust of the present study is how individual reporters carried out their assignments to witness the war's battles and major events first hand, and then conveyed the accounts to the readers at home. It also is limited to events on the southern fronts. Reporting on the military operations in the West was infrequent, and consequently that area is not included in the present study.

Included within the scope of this study is the condition of American journalism in 1846, particularly the newspapers in New Orleans, which were crucial in the overall coverage of the war, and the major means of news communication during the period. The study also discusses in detail the development of the American press behind the army's lines in Mexico. This was a factor unique to the Mexican War. A large number of urban center printers volunteered to serve in the military during the opening stages of the war, and they later found opportunities to establish American controlled newspapers in Mexican cities where the army maintained garrisons. Most of these publications were supported with military patronage, primarily for presenting propaganda about American motives in the war. But they also served a further double purpose of presenting news from America to the troops, and news about the troops to the newspapers back home.

Another aspect of this study deals with the question of censorship and newspaper suppression by the military. For the number of problems faced by the army, and the amount of time it was forced to occupy large segments of territory in Mexico, the

incidents of newspaper suppression were few and far between. But this issue, in general, is critical to the operation of a free press and therefore is explored in depth in this study.

Relying heavily on extensive search of the key newspapers involved in reporting the Mexican War, this study also seeks to reconstruct the efforts, methods, life styles, achievements and failures of the individual American reporters and, to a lesser degree, the overall journalistic system in which they functioned. The combined efforts of the American reporters in Mexico, and their enterprising editors at home, made the Mexican War, in the words of historian Robert Selph Henry, "the first war in history to be adequately and comprehensively reported in the daily press." In 1857 William Howard Russell of the London Times was to gain fame as "the world's first war correspondent" for his efforts in the Crimea, but they came a decade after the extensive Mexican War reporting by the "special correspondents" of the American press. And it was not a case of one or two American reporters in Mexico. One of the key findings of the present study is the extensiveness of the effort by the American press in Mexico. Kendall of the New Orleans Picayune and Frenner of the New Orleans Delta were central figures in that effort, but so too, in their own ways, were Christopher Mason Haile, F. A. Lumsden, D. Scully, John E. Durivage and Charles Callahan of the Picayune; George Tobin of the Delta; John Peoples of the Delta and the New Orleans Crescent; William C. Tobey, Philadelphia North American and John Warland of the Boston Atlas. The efforts



and writing of these principal correspondents are singled out and presented in depth in this study.

In addition to these reporters, there was a larger, but less important body of writers, called in the language of the day "occasional correspondents." These were part-time writers, many of them former reporters or printers serving in the army, who were scattered across Mexico in the camps of, and cities occupied by the American army. A third category of correspondents was referred to as "letter writers." In the definition of the day these were usually members of the army or navy who wrote letters to the country's political press, usually promoting or attempting to discredit the efforts of various leading military officers or units. Added to this heavy volume of letters for the country's press was the extensive body of reporting provided by the colorful "war newspapers" which the Yankee printers established in the wake of the occupation army. Much of the content of these publications found its way to the papers at home, the combined collection of letters, sketches and eye-witness narratives making the Mexican War the most thoroughly and extensively reported war to that time.

## CHAPTER 2

### JOURNALISM IN 1846

There is a great lack of excitement, and a war with Mexico is what might be termed a 'real blessing to...correspondents and editors.' I wouldn't mind shedding my last drop of ink in the cause.

— Charleston Courier  
February 9, 1846

The start of the Mexican War was anticipated by the American press. There had been steadily increasing coverage of the problems with Mexico since early 1845 when Congress and President Tyler moved to annex Texas and President Polk ordered Zachary Taylor's small army to the new state to support the political action. The New Orleans newspapers, close to these events and with a great interest in the American expansionist movement, had been providing sustained coverage of Taylor's army and events in Texas. Carried to the north by boat, horseback, train, and to a limited extent, telegraph, the news from the southwest made good copy for most of the country's newspapers.<sup>1</sup>

The outbreak of the war coincided with a period of rapid growth for American newspapers and the continued emergence of the penny press as the dominant style of journalism. An 1846 prospectus for a new penny paper in New Orleans helped explain the changing newspaper climate of the times:

The great object now is to obtain circulation and currency by publishing on terms so cheap that all may read. News is not exclusively for speculators and financiers. The whole community — the great masses of the people — claim these benefits, and this demand is silently working a radical change in the newspaper system.<sup>2</sup>

The penny journals, the prospectus continued, "were more piquant and spirited, more elevated in tone and temper, more free from partisan asperity and far better adapted to prevailing taste."<sup>3</sup>

In 1847 the New Orleans Delta explained the changing press situation this way:

We (have) witnessed the failure of too many newspaper enterprises established to carry out the purposes and objective of party cliques, sects or individuals... (American) people are thoroughly investigative and deliberative. They will examine, discuss and decide for themselves; and to this satisfactorily they will look on both sides of every question... and make their own inferences.... Therefore, one-sided or party journalism is becoming daily less successful in our country.<sup>4</sup>

A popular term at the time for penny papers was "the neutral press." But to be neutral did not mean to remain silent on national issues. The New Orleans Picayune, a popular and financially successful penny paper, explained: "All those matters which pertain to government or administration of public affairs are deemed political." It continued, "For one we disclaim that sort of neutrality which acknowledges the exclusive right of the political press to monopolize all such topics."<sup>5</sup> The weakness of the party press, as the Picayune saw it, was that it was "absolute in the belief" that only "the peculiar creed it professes could solve the country's problems." The independent

press, according to the Picayune, judged each such issue in light of public good, regardless of politics: "With the clearest intentions a journalist might sometimes yield to the silent pressure of his personal political relations; but in so far as he does this his paper falls off from its high calling."<sup>6</sup>

But the "neutral press" had not quite won its place in the sun. A number of political papers questioned whether there was such a thing as neutrality in a publication. A prominent southern Whig paper, the Augusta Chronicle and Sentinel, stated: "The continued efforts to pass off the New York Sun, Baltimore Sun and Philadelphia Ledger as 'independent or neutral papers'.. are certainly the grossest attempts at imposition on the public that can be imagined."<sup>7</sup> The infighting between the two journalism styles remained brisk throughout this period, and before the war was over both forms made important contributions to reporting its many events.

\* \* \* \* \*

Despite the growth of the penny press, the political press remained important in American journalism during the Mexican War. Among the most important papers in this class were the Washington (D.C.) National Intelligencer, pro-Whig and anti-war in its outlook, and the Washington Union, the Polk Administration's quasi-official organ. To fully understand the contribution of the political press to the general coverage of the war, it is valuable to understand the attitudes of President Polk towards the press in general.<sup>8</sup>

The political situation in the United States at the time was about evenly split between the Democrats and the Whigs and it remained so throughout the war; this was an important factor in the Mexico campaigns and fighting. Polk had been speaker of the house of representatives and governor of Tennessee, but still was a "dark horse" when he received the Democrats' nomination in 1844 to run against the Whigs better known Henry Clay. Clay, however, failed to "read" the American mood for expansion. Polk, meanwhile, was an ardent expansionist and campaigned on the slogan of "54-40 or fight" in pursuit of the northernmost limit of the Oregon Territory. Polk won, and in his first message to Congress in 1845 stated the Polk Doctrine: "The people of this continent alone have the right to decide their own destiny." This was a warning to the British not to interfere with the westward movement of the United States, and at the same time an expression of the mood of many (but by no means all) Americans for expansion to the West.<sup>9</sup>

Polk set out on his Presidency with the objective of obtaining Oregon and California for the United States, and before it ended he reached his goal. Press historian James E. Pollard has noted, "Had it not been for the press, James K. Polk might as well have retired to a monastery instead of occupying the White House as far as Presidential contacts with the public were concerned."<sup>10</sup> This situation came about because Polk's administration and the Mexican War occurred at a time when the American press was expanding rapidly from the limited roles of the party

and merchantile press. The penny press was growing rapidly in the major population centers as Polk came to office.

Although he has been called "Polk the Plodder," and did not have a large personal following, in the area of political journalism the President was quite experienced and astute. He might have remained almost completely unknown, even to most of his contemporaries, if it had not been for the Washington Union, the administration's organ. As Polk took office he immediately had a problem regarding the administration press. There already existed a key Democratic paper, the Washington Globe, edited by Francis P. Blair. But Blair had not supported Polk previously, and despite the editor's fame and strong support from Andrew Jackson, Polk decided to replace him as government printer and administration spokesman.<sup>11</sup>

After some indecision, Polk settled on veteran journalist Thomas Ritchie, then 66, editor of the Richmond Enquirer for 41 years.<sup>12</sup> Ritchie was reluctant at first to accept the post, but Polk told the editor he was needed to unite the party and possibly save the Union.<sup>13</sup> Moved by this argument, plus Polk's assurance that Ritchie had "a clear and friendly field" before him, the editor accepted. Although Ritchie was to edit the Union for seven years, there is ample evidence scattered through the diary Polk kept during his four years as President that he did not consider Ritchie one of his closest advisers.<sup>14</sup> In Polk's eyes Ritchie's failing was that he could not keep a secret. "It is an infirmity with Mr. Ritchie that he cannot keep a secret,"

the President wrote. "Without meaning to do wrong, such is his propensity to give news to the public, and appear to the public to be the executive organ, that he (guesses) what I may (do)."<sup>15</sup> After one leak of official information by the editor, Polk wrote, "He meant no harm I am satisfied, (but) all he knows, though given to him in confidence, he is almost certain to put in his newspaper." Despite this "weakness," as Polk described it, he apparently did not hold it against Ritchie. "I have the utmost confidence in Mr. Ritchie's honor and sound principles, but his weakness is his passion to put everything he knows in his paper. This passion has become constitutional with him and I do not therefore, censure him for it."<sup>16</sup>

In installing Ritchie as the official spokesman, Polk switched the administration paper's title from the Globe to the Union. The new paper started publishing May 1, 1845. Before long Ritchie began having trouble with both the Whigs and various factions of the Democrats which did not support Polk, particularly the supporters of Senator John C. Calhoun of South Carolina. Ritchie's biographer noted, "Drafted as a conciliator and pacifier, Ritchie had been too long a free man to now play the role of a politician on a national scale."<sup>17</sup> Further, "he had opinions of his own, a self-respect, and a regard for the rights of people which made it next to impossible for him to flatter the vanity of officials in high position or to sacrifice principle." As a result, Ritchie went from receiving the lucrative government printing contract in 1845 by almost unanimous vote,<sup>18</sup> to losing it in 1846, to being barred from the floor

of the Senate in 1847 by a coalition of the Whigs and Calhoun-ites.<sup>19</sup> On the strictly political level, the net contribution of Ritchie to the institution of official government newspaper was to weaken it. (Four more presidents after Polk had official newspapers, but the editors' role continued to decline.)<sup>20</sup>

During the Mexican War, however, the Union was one of the most important newspapers in the country. Several factors contributed to this: Ritchie's continual access to the President, his cabinet members and other officials of the War and State Departments; (2) the number of exclusive reports, military documents and government plans which these contacts provided him; and (3) the belief of most of the nation's newspapers that he was speaking for the President in the tradition of previous official editors, even though this wasn't always the case with Polk.

Polk might not have been enamoured with Ritchie's ability as a political editor, but the President realized he had to keep public opinion regarding the war on his side, and he often summoned the Union's editor to the White House to obtain official documents and battle reports for immediate publication. In the journalistic style of the day, the official battle reports often were printed in full, even when they took a full day's news hole, or even several days', at times, to accommodate them. The New Orleans Delta expressed the opinion of a number of newspapers when it said it used the Union's official reports in full because "we mean to make our paper an authentic record of the war."<sup>21</sup> Papers such as the Delta and New Orleans Picayune also believed these reports, compiled by the principal officers at the scene



of battle, documented the accuracy of their correspondents' accounts.<sup>22</sup>

The National Intelligencer, an important source of government and congressional news for the nation's press since its founding in 1800, was on the decline in the late 1840s.<sup>23</sup> The paper was no longer receiving the government printing contracts which had allowed it to be a strong voice for so many years, and it published only tri-weekly during the Mexican War period. However, it was still widely recognized as a strong voice for the Whigs, and it constantly raised the ire of the President. In April, 1847, after dispatching his official peace representative to Mexico, Polk wrote in his diary:

Had (Trist's peace) mission and the object of it been proclaimed in Washington in advance, I have no doubt there are persons in Washington, and among them the editors of the National Intelligencer, who would have been ready and willing to have dispatched a courier to Mexico to discourage the government of that weak and distracted country from entering upon negotiations for peace. This they would rather do than suffer my administration to have the credit for concluding a just and honorable peace. The articles in the National Intelligencer and other Federal papers against their own government and in favor of the enemy, have done more to prevent a peace than all the armies of the enemy. The Mexican papers republish these treasonable papers and make the ignorant population of Mexico believe that the Democratic party will shortly be expelled from power in the United States, and that their friends (the Whigs) will come into power. If the war is protracted it is to be attributed to the treasonable course of the (Whig) editors and leading men.<sup>24</sup>

Information about the peace mission did leak, however,

and the New York Herald broke the story. "Vexed and excited," Polk recorded: "In disclosing the fact of the mission...there has been treachery somewhere."<sup>25</sup> It was another example, he believed, of "the (Whig) press and leading men...giving 'aid and comfort' to the enemy." And the worst was the National Intelligencer, Polk believed, since its anti-war policy was an "unpatriotic and UnAmerican course."<sup>26</sup> But while its anti-war editorials gave the President discomfort, the National Intelligencer played little role in the war's reporting and seldom served as an original source of war news as did the Administration's own publication, the Union.

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The energy of the young penny press was better suited to serving the public demand for news of the war. An editorial in the New Orleans Crescent observed:

In this day of universal competition there is no branch of business in which more enterprise and energy are exhibited than in the publication of our daily papers. 'Pony Expresses' in advance of the mails — 'Special Expresses' from Mexico — 'Telegraphic Despatches,' and 'Particular Lightning Correspondents' are all the rage, and evince the eagerness with which the publishers seek to deserve and win public favor.<sup>27</sup>

Regarding the public's demand, a Charleston Courier correspondent noted, "Every rumor from the army is eagerly swallowed, and yet the cry is still like Oliver Twists for 'more'...the newspapers pour forth in a flood of extras, sometimes issuing two and three in a day."<sup>28</sup> In May, 1846 the New York Sun stated, "Our extras over the past few days have averaged over 22,000 copies per day,

making, with our regular daily edition, nearly 70,000 copies issued from our steam presses for several days in succession."<sup>29</sup> The papers were rushed to keep up with the demands for the news. The New Orleans Delta stated: "This is a busy...time for us editors and printers. We yesterday issued three editions of our paper, and the click-click of our Napier (press) never ceased...."<sup>30</sup> A Charleston Courier correspondent noted, "'Any news from the army?' takes the place of 'How d'ye do?' — and any person going hurriedly into or from a newspaper office creates an instantaneous impression on the crowd, who always surround the bulletin board at the door, that an extra is about to be issued..."<sup>31</sup> Newspaper offices frequently drew crowds, particularly when news was expected. An exasperated Boston Post editor wrote, "The dearest friend we have in the world we never desire to see more than five minutes at a time in our office. Business is business." The New Orleans Picayune agreed "there is a sympathy of feeling on this subject."<sup>32</sup> The desire for war news was so great, some editors observed, that many papers did not reach their destinations, "disappearing" en route. The editor of the Clinton (Ia.) Louisiana Floridian said only one copy of the Picayune arrived by express in his part of the state after the battle of Monterrey in September, 1846. "When the news was received," he wrote, "a salute was fired. This soon brought in the inhabitants from the country and our office was besieged from morn till night....we distributed upwards of five hundred (extras)..."<sup>33</sup>

In addition to extra editions, the papers often ran off extra copies with special items related to the war. After receiving a detailed list of the Americans killed and wounded at Monterrey, the Picayune announced in advance the list would appear, adding, "We shall print extras tomorrow for the use of gentlemen who may desire them to send off to friends or correspondents by mail."<sup>34</sup> When the New Orleans Delta ran a map and summary of the Monterrey battle it reported the edition "sold out in less than an hour despite an extra large press run...."<sup>35</sup>

It should be noted that an "extra edition" didn't necessarily mean the republication of an entire newspaper. Many "extras" were only the size of a large galley (or tray) of newspaper type. A one-page extra published by the Washington Union in October, 1847 containing news about the capture of Mexico City measured 18 inches in depth and two columns (about five inches) in width.<sup>36</sup> But, whatever their size, they were popular with the public. After one battle, a correspondent of the Union told of crowds in New York City mobbing newspaper bulletin boards, "extras flying noisily about by the thousands." The reporter wrote, "People were buying Tribune extras at two cents and reading them at the top of their voices."<sup>37</sup> In April, 1847, after the news of the capture of Vera Cruz reached Philadelphia, the North American stated, "There never was an extra published in our city which was called for so long and eagerly."<sup>38</sup>

The demand for and on the papers during this period soon had impact. At one point in April, 1847, following a steady

stream of reports about American victories at Buena Vista and Vera Cruz, the Baltimore Sun commented, "The great crowd of news for several days has forced us to (empty) our columns of advertising." The paper explained, "We shall spare no expense to accommodate (our readers). As soon as the inventive genius of this country can construct a press that will enable us to print our immense edition quicker than the double cylinder we now have we shall procure one...."<sup>39</sup> The Charleston Courier reported 1847 had been its greatest year ever, and attributed it to providing its readers "the earliest intelligence." It had been expensive to provide, the paper explained, due to the costs of expresses and telegraphic reports, "but worth it."<sup>40</sup> In New York the Herald, Sun and Tribune argued throughout the war over who had the largest circulation, each hoping to obtain the Post Office Department's printing contract as a result -- the Sun claiming 55,000, the Herald upwards of 40,000, and the Tribune, defining its figures as the only honest ones, 20,000.<sup>41</sup>

In Fall, 1846 the Philadelphia North American noted the growth of newspapers was somewhat disguised: "The rapid increase of newspapers in this country must have attracted the attention of the most ordinary observer, but the increase of newspaper circulation is not so well understood, because it is not so apparent."<sup>42</sup> The North American stated in 1846 it had doubled the circulation which it had taken seven previous years to build. The Public Ledger, it stated, had increased its circulation from 23,000 to 30,000 during 1846. The North American also reported

large increases for three of the city's weekly newspapers: the Dollar Newspaper (up 8,000 to 31,000); the Saturday Courier (up 20,000 to 60,000); and Neal's Saturday Gazette (up 7,000 to 15,000). Even when several losses were figured into the Philadelphia circulation figures, the North American reported the city's newspaper consumption still had grown by more than 50,000 copies during the year. The reasons for the increase, the paper concluded, were the growth of public education, freedom of the press and better journalists, who were displaying "intelligence, industry and accuracy."<sup>43</sup>

Journalism historian Frank Luther Mott has observed the merchantile and party press were still the dominant forms during the period prior to the Civil War, but the penny press, riding the wave of changes caused in American society by the Industrial Revolution, was growing rapidly.<sup>44</sup> As a result the penny papers were growing rapidly in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, New Orleans and other urban centers. The penny papers were bringing about a shift in the content of news, also. Local news, sensational items dealing with crime and sex, and human interest stories all were becoming important elements of news selection.<sup>45</sup> The reading public, in turn, was responding to the new format, and circulations and profits of a number of the penny papers increased steadily.

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Eventually, the process of issuing "war extras" started to bother some editors. In March, 1847, after the battle of

Buena Vista, which resulted in a month-long series of garbled and incorrect accounts, the Mobile (Ala.) Advertiser pledged "not to humbug the public with any more 'extras' with news founded on mere rumor."<sup>46</sup> During Summer, 1847, when the American correspondents experienced a number of problems in getting their reports out of Mexico, a New York writer observed, "No news from Mexico of late, although the Herald, Tribune and Sun occasionally favor us with an 'extra' to inform us nothing had occurred since their last."<sup>47</sup>

The misuse of scare heads also was a problem through most of the war. During a slack period in the coverage, in Summer 1847, the New Orleans Delta commented:

One of the newspapers yesterday headed the news from Mexico 'Important.' We have yet to learn its importance, or that...it was any news at all. But the head was attractive; there was something seen in it, if there was nothing found in the body to which it was attached.<sup>48</sup>

The Picayune also called attention to the paradox of newspapers putting "swelling heads" on pointless leads. It cited a lead in the New Orleans Commercial Times which stated blandly: "No intelligence direct from the city of Mexico, or even from Puebla, traceable to any authentic source, has reached Vera Cruz since the date of our last advices." After reading the two-and-a-half column article which followed, the Picayune complained: "We could find nothing purporting to be authentic." The headline over the article had stated: "Important Intelligence; Failure of Peace Negotiations, Another Severe Battle with the Guerrillas." The Picayune concluded: "The truth is the Times

appears determined to 'head' its contemporaries or 'die.'... (It is) bringing the authority of the press...into disrepute by the recklessness and extravagance of its assertions...."<sup>49</sup>

In addition to the occasional false or misleading treatment of the news, the papers often speculated on how the campaigns would be conducted. The efforts of American newspaper "strategists" were ridiculed by a British military officer writing in the Montreal Gazette. He noted:

If the American press, which exults in the privilege...of making, if possible, its own government appear contemptible, has succeeded in bewildering the Mexicans by its crude and ridiculous conjectures on the designs of the war authorities, as completely as it has bewildered its own countrymen, the service done the "state" has been most patriotic.

The same writer pointed out Polk's Administration was not "involved in a daily changing vortex of public perplexities as it has pleased (American) newspapers to represent," but instead was following a "well digested plan of operations." The writer concluded that the only way the government could satisfy its newspaper critics was to bring "the war to maturity with the hasty expedition of a ninety-day note or a shipment of flour...."<sup>50</sup>

The widespread use of newsboys to distribute the penny papers brought an added dimension to the wartime press. When news of Zachary Taylor's victory at Buena Vista reached New York on April 1, 1847, an eyewitness reported:

Around the newspaper offices the excitement was intense; the people swarmed like bees, climbing up each other's backs to catch a glimpse of the notices on the bulletin boards; crowds of ragged news-boys fought their way



into the different offices, and stood jammed up together, as tight as a compressed cotton bale. They were waiting for the extras... (which) are rapidly distributed, reeking wet.<sup>51</sup>

When the newsboys hit the streets with the extras, the reporter wrote, they immediately broke into shouts: "Here's the extra 'Erald - got the great battle in Mexico! Here's the extra Sun - Got General Taylor Victorious! Here's the seventh edition of the Evening Express - Got Santa Anna cut to pieces!" There was little trouble selling the extras, according to the observer:

The merchant rushes from his store and buys an extra...cartmen draw up to the sidewalk and stop with their loaded carts while they read.... the clerk, on his way to the bank, reads a full account....The dandy on the hotel steps, the cabman on the stand, the butcher at his stall, the loafer on the dock, the lady in the parlor, the cook in the kitchen, the waiter in the bar-room, the clerk in the store, the actor at rehearsal, the judge upon the bench, the lawyer in the court, the officer in attendance, even the prisoner at the bar, (read) of the victory and rejoice!...<sup>52</sup>

A Philadelphia North American correspondent was awakened in New York City by the cry, "War, War! Here's the extra Tribune with the war with Mexico!" He observed, "Our war news we get quickly," attributing it to the telegraph, fast composition and "newsboy vagabonds, who scour the city in every direction." To him the youths were "war's begrimed and ragged messengers."<sup>53</sup>

A New York correspondent of the Charleston Courier complained:

The news boys are just crying in the streets 'Extry Sun' with the particulars of the surrender of Mexico, one of those impudent humbugs which that paper is in the habit of concocting out of old news and serving us as fresh and authentic.

This tactic usually worked, however, the writer explained, because: "We are all so anxious for news from Mexico that only the word is enough to arrest our attention."<sup>54</sup> When not faced with a newspaper humbug, the unwary reader could be faced with a newsboy's humbug. "Towards night when the newsboys find they are likely to have a large lot of their papers left," a reporter stated, "they rush through the streets shouting "Ere's the Extry Tribune, got another great battle in Mexico and the death of General Scott.'" The little vendor would sell the 2-cent sheet for 6 cents, and rush out of sight before the buyer realized it was only a deception.<sup>55</sup>

The New Orleans Delta warned customers some newsboys were selling its extras for 10 cents when "they should only be 5 cents."<sup>56</sup> After it issued an extra with news of the fall of Vera Cruz in April, 1847 the New Orleans Picayune cautioned subscribers: "The news-boys in selling the paper will on no account charge anything for the additional sheet. Gentlemen must not be imposed upon by them, and if they will report any who may attempt to trick them into paying for the supplement, we will promptly and gladly discharge them."<sup>57</sup>

Despite the deceptions, the public still sought the "latest intelligence." When a false report reached New York City in March, 1847 that Vera Cruz had fallen without the firing of a shot, a writer for the Washington Union noted, "The joy at the news, even if true, is dashed somewhat by the ease of the victory. The gentle public would have preferred the pleasing

excitement of such blood and thunder headings as these: FALL OF VERA CRUZ! BOMBARDMENT OF SAN JUAN D'ULLOA FOR THREE DAYS!! TERRIFIC CARNAGE!!! THE TOWN DESTROYED!!! MEXICAN GARRISON ANNIHILATED!!!! TEN THOUSAND KILLED, WOUNDED AND MISSING!!!"

The writer concluded, "O man, man! What a compound of contridictions."<sup>58</sup>

Another problem the papers faced was the uneven flow of news from the war zones. Complaining about the lack of news from the army camps in Sumner, 1846, the New Orleans Delta observed: "The want of activity at present prevailing in camp, is of course unfavorable to news; dullness is a nonconductor of that element that gives spirit and usefulness to a newspaper."<sup>59</sup> When no newspapers were published on July 4, 1846, in New Orleans, a correspondent for the Charleston Courier wrote, "No papers, no mail! Everybody looks blank. A daily newspaper has become about as necessary to the existence of those 'in cities bred' as their breath, and they can hardly dispense with one better than the other."<sup>60</sup> In 1847 a writer for the Picayune gave this description of a day without news:

Yesterday was one of those dull days during which everyone is inquiring of his neighbor for news, but without obtaining any very satisfactory response. To begin with there was no northern mail. This, itself, would ruin the appetite of an editor for his breakfast. Thousands of persons were all agog to hear, and expect you to furnish them with the full, true and interesting particulars of something you are yet to learn the first word of. Some people appear to look upon a newspaper as they would a river — it is bound to keep on running, 'rain or shine,' with a full volume of water ever fresh and flowing — little thinking that the head of the editor has

at times to be tasked very hard to furnish them with their daily morsel.

Item hunters hung down their heads in despair, news reporters looked chop-fallen, while the hangers-on about the courts cursed the system of 'penny-a-lining.' Stagnation of news reigned supreme and universal, impregnating all pursuits and occupations, and diffusing itself among all classes and conditions of life.<sup>61</sup>

On another occasion, when it only had rumors to report, the Picayune noted: "We are weary with giving so much mere speculation in regard to the views of our government as to peace, and the (settlement) which will be satisfactory; but the public crave information and we give the best we have."<sup>62</sup>

Weary of such reports or not, the newspapers of the period worked hard to meet the demands placed on them for news of the events in Mexico. Spurred by the challenge to be "first with the latest intelligence," they continually sought ways to speed the news from the distant war zones, and to print and present it to the public faster. It was a time of change within the press, the newer penny press attempting to replace the traditional merchantile and political press as the dominant form in American journalism. This competition continued throughout the war period. It also was a time of inconsistency for the press — examples of good journalism mixed with bad, honest reporting mixed with occasional deceptions. Overall, however, the Mexican War provided a timely and challenging opportunity for American newspapers, and they responded to it eagerly. By the time the conflict ended it had become, as one war historian noted, "the first war in history to be reported adequately and comprehen-

sively in the daily press."<sup>63</sup>

## NOTES

1. In general, the Mexican War has not been studied extensively historically, including the area of the mass media. Extensive search has not discovered a study similar to the present one. There are several general studies of public opinion during the war, the best being John J. Schroeder, Mr. Polk's War; American Opposition and Dissent, 1846-1848 (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1973); and Frederick Merk, Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History (New York: Vintage Books, 1963). The most complete history of the war, and the one which has been most relied on in the present study is Justin H. Smith, The War with Mexico (2 vols., New York: The Macmillan Co., 1919). Other useful studies of the war include Jack K. Bauer, The Mexican War, 1846-48 (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1974); Alfred H. Bill, Rehearsal for Conflict, the war with Mexico 1846-48, (New York: Knopf, 1947); Seymour V. Connor and Odie B. Faulk, North America Divided; The Mexican War, 1846-48 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971); Robert Selph Henry, The Story of the Mexican War (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1950); Otis A. Singletary, The Mexican War (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960); John Edward Weems, To Conquer a Peace (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1974). Books on special aspects of the war which have proved useful in this study are Charles Winslow Elliott, Winfield Scott, the Soldier and the Man (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1937); David Lavender, Climax at Buena Vista (Philadelphia and New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1966); Charles A. McCoy, Polk and the Presidency (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1960); Milo M. Quaife, ed., The Diary of James K. Polk, 1845-1849, (4 vols., Chicago: A.C. McClurg Co., 1922); George Winston Smith and Charles Judah, eds., Chronicles of the Gringos; The U.S. Army in Mexico, 1846-1848 (Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico Press, 1968); Edward S. Wallace, General William Jenkins Worth; Monterey's Forgotten Hero (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1953).

Specific histories on reporters and the press during the Mexican War are scarce. Most helpful to this study have been Fayette Copeland, Kendall of the Picayune (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1943); Thomas Ewing Dabney, One Hundred Great Years; The Story of the Times-Picayune from its Founding to 1940 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1944); Milton Rickels, Thomas Bangs Thorpe, Humorist of the Old Southwest (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1962). Copeland's study of George Wilkins Kendall, editor of the New Orleans Picayune, is the most extensive on any correspondent of the Mexican War, and contains much useful background information about New Orleans, Texas and the period of the war. There is a limited amount of information on reporters during the Mexican War in Frederick Lauriston Bullard, Famous War Correspondents (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1914); John Hohenberg, Foreign Correspondence: The Great Reporters and Their Times (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964); Joseph J. Mathews, Reporting

the Wars (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1957).

Although the general journalism histories are useful in understanding the background of the penny press during this period, they contain little on the reporting of the Mexican War. Frederic Hudson, Journalism in the United States, from 1690 to 1872 (New York: Harper & Row, 1873) contains the most original information, but it is scattered throughout the text, and incomplete. Also of value are Frank Luther Mott, American Journalism, A History: 1690-1960, third edition, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1962) and Edwin Emery, The Press and America, third edition, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1972). Also of value for this period are James E. Pollard, The President and the Press (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1947); Frank M. O'Brien, The Story of the Sun (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1928); and Gerald W. Johnson, et. al., The Sunpapers of Baltimore (New York: Knopf, 1937).

2. Quoted in New Orleans Picayune, December 9, 1846.
3. Ibid.
4. New Orleans Delta, November 2, 1847.
5. New Orleans Picayune, December 21, 1847.
6. Ibid.
7. Augusta (Georgia) Chronicle and Sentinel, February 2, 1847; also see January 5, 1848.
8. For the best information on Polk's attitudes toward the press see Schroeder, op. cit.; Quaife, ed., Polk Diary, op. cit.; McCoy, op. cit.; and Pollard, op. cit.
9. McCoy, op. cit., Chaps. 1-2.
10. Pollard, op. cit., pp. 229-253.
11. Ibid.
12. For a biography of Ritchie see Charles Henry Ambler, Thomas Ritchie, A Study in Virginia Politics (Richmond: Bell, Book and Stationery Co., 1913). Unfortunately, this study stresses his early political activities rather than his editorial performance.
13. Ibid., p. 253.
14. See Quaife, ed., Polk Diary, op. cit., References to Ritchie are scattered through the four volumes.
15. Ibid., IV: 214-5.

16. Ibid., III: 237.
17. Ambler, op. cit., p. 258.
18. Ibid., p. 260.
19. Quaife, ed., Polk Diary, op. cit., II: 378.
20. Pollard, op. cit., pp. 254-275.
21. New Orleans Delta, May 27, 1847.
22. See New Orleans Picayune, October 21, 1847.
23. For a history of this publication see William E. Ames, A History of the National Intelligencer (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1972).
24. Quaife, ed., Polk Diary, op. cit., II: 479.
25. Ibid., II: 482.
26. Ibid.
27. New Orleans Crescent, April 15, 1848.
28. Charleston Courier, May 25, 1846.
29. New York Sun, May 16, 1846.
30. New Orleans Delta, May 3, 1846.
31. Charleston Courier, May 25, 1846.
32. New Orleans Picayune, September 20, 1845.
33. Quoted in Ibid., October 15, 1846.
34. Ibid., November 3, 1846.
35. New Orleans Delta, October 13, 1846.
36. Washington Union extra, October 21, 1847.
37. Ibid., April 1, 1847.
38. Philadelphia North American, April 3, 1847.
39. Baltimore Sun, April 5, 1847.
40. Charleston Courier, July 1, 1848.



41. New York Sun, January 1, 1848. Also see circulation figures for various papers in New York Herald, February 10, 1848.
42. Philadelphia North American, November 14, 1846.
43. Ibid.
44. Mott, op. cit., Chap. XII. Emery, op. cit., Chap. XI, agrees with this.
45. Mott, op. cit., pp. 242-3.
46. Quoted in New Orleans Delta, March 25, 1847.
47. Quoted in New Orleans Picayune, August 7, 1847.
48. New Orleans Delta, July 31, 1847.
49. New Orleans Picayune, July 31, 1847.
50. Ibid., November 19, 1846.
51. Ibid., April 13, 1847.
52. Ibid.
53. Philadelphia North American, May 12, 1846.
54. Charleston Courier, September 17, 1847.
55. Ibid., September 29, 1847.
56. New Orleans Delta, May 19, 1846.
57. New Orleans Picayune, Apr 6, 1847.
58. Washington Union, March 31, 1847.
59. New Orleans Delta, July 7, 1846.
60. Charleston Courier, July 11, 1846.
61. New Orleans Picayune, March 21, 1847.
62. Ibid., April 30, 1847.
63. Robert Selph Henry, The Story of the Mexican War, (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1950), i.

### CHAPTER 3

#### COMMUNICATIONS: HOW THE NEWS GOT THERE

Oh! You're a horse,  
Professor Morse.  
If you wer'nt I would'nt say so!

Whew! dam my eyes,  
How the lightning flies —  
When you tick and click away so!

New Orleans Crescent  
March 29, 1848

The name of Samuel F.B. Morse, American artist and inventor, was a household word during the Mexican War.<sup>1</sup> His revolutionary invention, the magnetic telegraph, was spreading across the country during this period,<sup>2</sup> and although it was not the most important factor in transmitting the news from the war zones, its importance grew continually. The dramatic impact of transmitting intelligence so quickly over long distances caught the imagination of the nation's press and public. As a result, the efforts and competition to develop and spread various telegraph systems were a running story in the nation's newspapers throughout the war. But the telegraph didn't reach its full potential until after the Mexican War; the country wasn't completely linked by the new communication system until after the fighting had ended.<sup>3</sup> Equally important to communication during the war, therefore, were the pony express, U.S. mails, steamboats and, to

a lesser extent, railroads.<sup>4</sup>

The mails were the backbone of news transmission during the war, and poor mail service was a constant source of newspaper irritation throughout the period. In a long editorial demanding better mail service from the North, the New Orleans Picayune explained, "Editors...are greatly the most aggrieved of all parties who suffer from the present situation." Private mail expresses repeatedly ran a day faster than the government service, the Picayune stated.<sup>5</sup> "Two days could be saved between Boston and New Orleans" if private expresses were used, it argued in another editorial.<sup>6</sup> So frequently did the mail deliveries fail, that the New Orleans Delta observed, "...the mail service of the government between New York and this city has made commerce here a mere game of chance, at which those who have sufficient enterprise and skill may fleece at will the great body of people."<sup>7</sup> In September, 1846 the Delta reported there were 11 mail failures from the East in 22 days.<sup>8</sup> During December, 1846, the paper said, the mail deliveries failed 16 times.<sup>9</sup> In March, 1847 the number of "irregularities" in deliveries between New York and New Orleans reached 21, the paper reported.<sup>10</sup>

The post office at New Orleans, because it was a funnel for correspondence going to and from the war zones, was a particular point of contention. After the Picayune's coverage of the battle of Monterrey the paper received a number of complaints from subscribers and other newspapers about late delivery of the paper. The Picayune editorialized: "These complaints are

exceedingly annoying and vexatious...the publishers are accused of negligence....But the fault is not ours. It belongs to the Post Office Department and must be remedied. We are not willing longer to suffer from it, and the public will not."<sup>11</sup> "The press and the people of the country look to the New Orleans papers for news from the army," the Picayune argued, while asking the post office to distribute army mail as soon as it arrives. "Such (slowness) would not be tolerated in any other city of the union," the paper claimed.<sup>12</sup>

On another occasion, the Picayune complained a number of letters had reached New Orleans from its front-line correspondents on a steamship that arrived on a Friday afternoon, but no effort was made to open the mail bags and deliver the contents until the following Monday, missing several editions of the paper.<sup>13</sup> The Delta grew so frustrated with the postal service it urged "no more trickery" by the postal clerks with its mail. It demanded "fair play at the post office, and this we will endeavor to enforce through the laws...."<sup>14</sup> On several occasions the Delta stated it was unable to use important letters from its army correspondents because they had been delivered so late.<sup>15</sup>

Editors were particularly aware of the quality of mail service because much of the news in any paper came from its "exchanges" — the free copies of newspapers which editors all around the country exchanged. A liberal postal law accounted for the easy and cheap flow of news.<sup>16</sup> The exchange device provided editors a guaranteed method of filling their pages during slow news times, and helped keep a number of papers in existence.<sup>17</sup>

Most papers expected, even insisted upon the exchanges being provided. Typical was a statement in the New Orleans Crescent when it stated in March, 1848: "It is, of course, desireable for us to receive the latest newspapers from all quarters. Will our contemporaries by whom this number of the Crescent is received oblige us by promptly remitting their papers to us in the way of an exchange."<sup>18</sup> The arrival of the exchanges was a happy day for most editors. When a number of overdue mail deliveries from the East reached New Orleans, a correspondent for the Charleston Courier observed:

Glorious times these for newspaperdom!...  
 (I can hear) the glad clashing of scissors in  
 the sanctums of the New Orleans dailies....  
 in the absence of the mails the editorial fraternity have been obliged to draw largely on  
 their wits...<sup>19</sup>

Eventually, even free copies proved troublesome. Thomas Ritchie of the Washington Union complained it took too much labor to try to read the 140 exchange papers he received daily.<sup>20</sup> The editors of the Picayune noted they could not even open all of the exchanges they received. They announced they were trimming their list sharply since the practice was "wrongfully burdening the post office."<sup>21</sup> The post office agreed with this view, and, in fact, blamed the newspapers for much of the delivery problem because of the tons of free newspapers it had to move.<sup>22</sup> A conference of Georgia newspaper editors in September, 1847 decided that a copy of a daily newspaper only would be exchanged for another daily; that a weekly edition would be exchanged only for a weekly; and a tri-weekly only for a tri-weekly. The reason for

the policy an editorial in the Augusta (Georgia) Constitutionalist explained, was "the heavy expense of operating a daily newspaper, soon to be enhanced by the cost of telegraph accounts...."<sup>23</sup>

Despite wide spread complaints about the mail service, the New Orleans Delta was reluctant to blame the post office for its papers not reaching the army regularly. "There are many places for the mail to go astray when army units move so often," the paper pointed out.<sup>24</sup> Part of the problem can be explained by the volume of letters and papers the post office had to handle. One delivery arriving from Vera Cruz contained more than 15,000 letters from the army.<sup>25</sup> However, so great were newspaper complaints about poor mail service that the New Orleans Delta said the whole subject "has become a bore." It noted the more newspaper editors complained "the more stubborn and less speedy" the mail carriers became.<sup>26</sup>

The postal system, in fact, was being improved throughout the war period. A series of postal reform bills were enacted by the Congress between 1845 and 1851, modernizing the previous system and making postage rates and service more equitable on a nationwide basis. Most of the slow service could be traced to poor roads, unbridged rivers, inclement weather, careless mail contractors hired by the government to carry mail over remote areas and occasional inefficient postmasters.<sup>27</sup> From the Post Office's point of view, newspapers were the cause of many of the delivery problems.<sup>28</sup> Americans were "a newspaper people," one Congressional investigation of the Post Office problems in the

1840s observed, and this was resulting in tons of newspapers being added to the Post Office's burden.<sup>29</sup>

The newspapers, however, would not accept the argument they were the cause of the delays, nor could they afford to accept the loss of time caused by the delays. As a result, the most enterprising of the penny press editors turned to private pony express deliveries to try to beat the Post Office. It proved a highly successful system, often beating the telegraph, Post Office and other means of transmitting the news. As a result, before the war ended, the "ponies" of the Baltimore Sun, and other newspapers associated with it in the express systems, were as famous to the reading public as the correspondents sent to Mexico to report the battles.<sup>30</sup>

Ironically, the Post Office, under Postmaster General Amos Kendall, had pioneered in the use of pony express systems to carry news to and from New Orleans. During the late 1830s the system he developed netted as much as \$200,000 a year on the New Orleans route.<sup>31</sup> However, the expresses had fallen into disuse by the start of the war. At the time mail expresses by private operators actually were illegal under U.S. law. The law, however, was weak, and a number of small private express systems had started as early as 1839. They quickly proved they were faster and cheaper than the U.S. mails, and a number of companies were operating on a regular basis by the start of the war. It was to the services of these private express systems that the newspapers turned when the public demand grew to deliver the war news

quickly.<sup>32</sup>

On the eve of the war, the New Orleans papers made a strong appeal for the government to operate an express system between the North and the South. In presenting the argument for a government operated express, the Picayune stated, "It is not such a wonderful feat to run an express now as it was in Amos Kendall's time."<sup>33</sup> It was not even necessary, the paper pointed out, for the government messenger to traverse the whole route from New Orleans to Washington. "By keeping up an express upon one hundred and fifty miles of the route," the paper argued, the government would be able to beat out any private system operating against it. The main problem, according to the Picayune, was on "certain portions of the road this side of Charleston." (The phrase "The mails failed yesterday this side of Charleston" was one repeated frequently by the southern press during the war.) The problems could be overcome, the Picayune concluded, by placing government express riders between the "breaks in railroad and steamboat lines." The additional cost, it said, "would be trifling."<sup>34</sup> The government did not respond, however, and the burden soon fell to the newspapers.

Expresses run by newspapers were not new when the war started. There had been extensive use of the method by the Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Charleston and New Orleans papers in 1845 and early 1846 to relay European commercial and political news to their respective cities. The expresses were irregular, however, and were organized according to the twice-a-



month mail deliveries from England, and the importance of the news.<sup>35</sup> The New Orleans Picayune had utilized expresses from the North as early as 1838, and other New Orleans and Charleston newspapers had attempted it on occasion over the "Great Southern Route," as the Charleston-to-New Orleans route was called. A Charleston paper had even attempted it on a daily basis in 1845 in cooperation with two New Orleans commercial firms. "It went broke from the expense," the Picayune observed.<sup>36</sup>

What characterized the newspaper expresses used to transmit the Mexican War news was their regularity. They were run frequently on an "as needed basis," but starting in Fall, 1847 they were operated regularly several times a week, and between January 1 and June 1, 1848, they were operated on a daily basis between New Orleans and Baltimore.<sup>37</sup> Only when it became clear to the newspaper operators of the system that the war was not going to provide any more major news did they discontinue the service.

Most of the expresses operated on a cooperative basis, but the exact alliance of joint express systems is still unclear due to incomplete financial records for the period. It is clear from contemporary newspaper accounts the Baltimore Sun, New Orleans Picayune, New York Herald and Charleston Courier were involved in an ongoing arrangement to share daily copies of their newspapers through use of the express systems. Also involved in heavy use of expresses were the Philadelphia Public Ledger and North American, the Augusta (Georgia) Chronicle and Sentinel, the New York Sun, the New Orleans Delta, and on occasion, the Polk

Administration paper, the Washington Union.<sup>38</sup> The primary operators were the Baltimore Sun and the New Orleans Picayune, but there is widespread evidence in the papers of the period that other papers cooperated in the Sun-Picayune system (by sharing the costs) and at times ran their own express deliveries if the news warranted it.

There is little evidence, however, about the cost of the expresses. Most of the deliveries were made by private express companies under contract with the newspapers. The papers claimed the costs were so high as to be a burden; the only figures cited publicly ranged from \$750 to \$1,000 a delivery.<sup>39</sup>

At the same time the papers frequently stated they were happy to provide the added service for their readers. The Augusta Chronicle and Sentinel said it was paying the high express costs from New Orleans because "we cannot afford our readers a higher evidence of our purpose to furnish them with the most important news at the earliest moment."<sup>40</sup> The Picayune observed, "We cheerfully undertake the extra cost of expresses to enable us in some measure to requite the liberality of (our) public...."<sup>41</sup>

Newspapers which used the express were careful to promote their efforts whenever possible. Articles about the latest events in Mexico often started with a lead that the news had been brought by the ponies in advance of the regular mail. This lead from the Charleston Courier is typical:

Much to our surprise, but at the same time greatly to our gratification, our tried and trusty

little ponys, who 'never tire,' performed their duty again yesterday and brought us a copy of the New Orleans Picayune...full freighted with particulars of the battles that took place on the out-skirts of the city of Mexico....<sup>42</sup>

In April, 1847 after receiving an express from Mobile, Alabama, about the surrender of Vera Cruz, the Courier stated, "The news was brought to us by our exclusive express, which will also convey the news to the northern newspapers associated with us in this enterprise."<sup>43</sup> As the war continued the extensive coverage and time-saving performance by the horses made them community heroes. The Charleston Courier reported: "Our little light-heeled ponies...are so well fed, and are so much petted, that they cannot always be restrained and therefore move with unimportant as well as important news." The Courier noted also that the service was not limited to war news, but also brought commercial news.<sup>44</sup> On another occasion the Courier stated, "Our jolly little ponies take every opportunity to oblige us and our readers."<sup>45</sup>

In May, 1847, after the express had delivered the news of the American victories at Buena Vista, Vera Cruz and Cerro Gordo, the Baltimore Sun commented: "Our 'ponies' have again performed their task of distancing stages, railroads, steamboats and magnetic telegraphs, bringing our overland express package from New Orleans in six days."<sup>46</sup> The next day the Sun expanded, "Our 'ponies'...seem to have gone fully into the spirit of the enterprise, never tiring in their efforts to enable us to lay before our readers important and exclusive intelligence from our gallant

armies."<sup>47</sup> So anxious was the watch for the Sun's express, that occasionally even the telegraph joined in alerting editors that the messenger had passed through various locales on his way to Baltimore. Since the express ran 24 hours ahead of the mails, observed the Richmond Whig after one such alert, "we consequently can expect some interesting intelligence by this morning's Southern mail."<sup>48</sup> The Baltimore Sun also noted that the passing of the express rider at various points had led postmasters to start "endorsing on their way bill what the substance of the news is suppose to be...." This had led to a large number of false rumors being started in various cities, particularly Washington, according to the Sun. It concluded, "As we are not desirous of being even the indirect cause of disseminating incorrect intelligence we would suggest to postmasters the propriety of leaving our truthful 'ponies' to report for themselves...."<sup>49</sup>

The action of the postmasters regarding the news was somewhat indicative of the government's reaction generally to the newspapers' enterprise. The press frequently beat the government couriers carrying official accounts to the President and government departments. President Polk received the news that the military had captured Vera Cruz, one of the war's major events, via a telegram sent to him by the Baltimore Sun.<sup>50</sup> "This was joyful news," he noted that night in his diary,<sup>51</sup> but soon after he was pushing the military to establish a government express that could beat the newspapers.<sup>52</sup> "It is very important that the government should have the earliest intelligence from the seat of war," he

wrote, complaining about the efficiency of the Sun. "This should not be (and) moreover, it may be vastly important to the government to get the earliest news," the President jotted in his diary, expressing the viewpoint of many another president regarding the nation's press.<sup>53</sup>

In another incident, the administration was reported "highly annoyed" about learning of Commodore Sloat's departure from California through a letter printed in the New York Commercial Advertiser. "The Navy Department had heard nothing of all this," the Washington Union stated, adding it hoped "some means will be taken to expedite despatches over land."<sup>54</sup>

Secretary of State James Buchanan also had occasion to thank the press for supplying him news about the war. In November, 1846, Moses Yale Beach, owner and editor of the New York Sun, offered to supply the State Department with whatever information regarding Mexico he received. (Beach had a number of business contacts at Mexico City who sent him private letters throughout the war, many of which ended up in the pages of the Sun.) Buchanan responded: "Aware the great advantages which your establishment possesses for obtaining early and authentic news, I very gladly avail myself of your liberality in thus offering the use of them to the Department, and will ask the favor of you to transmit to it any information from (Mexico) which in your best judgment shall be of sufficient importance to warrant a resort to the Telegraph."<sup>55</sup> The fact that the press was able to deliver the war news as fast or faster than government couriers

caused the Charleston Courier to suggest, "This certainly shows a degree of enterprise and energy on the part of the press which should excite the emulation of the Government. We hope they will aid in bearing the expense of such an outlay....The government will be taken in as partners in the express if sufficient sum is advanced."<sup>56</sup> The government, however, made no overture to join the press in its express deliveries.

Another area where the government and Congress refused to become involved concerned the telegraph. After waiting two years, from 1844 to the start of 1846, for the government to decide whether or not it would take over the operation of his new invention, Morse reluctantly went ahead on his own with the development of it commercially.<sup>57</sup> Morse made an arrangement with Amos Kendall to serve as president of the Magnetic Telegraph Co., with Kendall handling the responsibilities throughout the war years of commercially developing the telegraph lines. Congress was asked on several occasions to undertake the task of financing the line to New Orleans to allow faster communication with the distant armies. Kendall even offered to buy back the line at cost when the war ended. The necessary legislation died in the Senate, however, killed off by the Calhoun faction on the argument it was unconstitutional for the federal government to develop the telegraph. After hearing this argument Kendall exclaimed, "It is not unconstitutional to use the lightning against Mexico!"<sup>58</sup> Another Kendall proposal asking the War Department to develop the line to New Orleans as a war measure (and then sell it

to Kendall's company when the war ended) also died.<sup>59</sup>

The press urged government action on the telegraph throughout the war. The Philadelphia North American stated "there should not be a single day's delay" in running the line to New Orleans, claiming it would only take a month to complete. The army would then be within "two or three days" of communication, the paper claimed.<sup>60</sup> The Philadelphia American Sentinel urged the government to build the line quickly: "... (then) the whole war could be carried on with the quickest dispatch, and with the circumspection that the important questions involved demand."<sup>61</sup> In November, 1846 Kendall was quoted by the Charleston Courier as saying the line would be extended to New Orleans "by private enterprise" in time for the 1847 elections. "The Government would have saved \$1 million during the Mexican War so far if the telegraph had existed to New Orleans," the paper quoted Kendall as saying.<sup>62</sup> A year after the war started the Philadelphia North American reported, "Had the President recommended the construction of a line of telegraphic communication between Washington and New Orleans at the outset of the war in connection with a line of swift steamers to Mexican ports...it is estimated between seven and ten millions would have been saved by the government."<sup>63</sup>

In the end private enterprise was used to develop the lines. The Morse controlled company started lines to the South and West from the Northeast, with a second line started to the West by a competitor, Henry O'Rielly.<sup>64</sup> Construction capital was

raised from private investors and "subscribers" in various cities, the lines costing approximately \$150 a mile to build.<sup>65</sup> The Washington and New Orleans Telegraph Co., a Morse subsidiary, started work on one route to the South in November, 1846. By that time the Northeast was linked from Washington to Boston, and by another line to Buffalo.<sup>66</sup> However, the line ran only to Petersburg, Virginia, by the time the war's major events came to a conclusion in Fall, 1847 with the capture of Mexico City, and the system as a whole was not operational until well after the war ended.<sup>67</sup>

It was clear from the beginning the lines were being developed for commercial purposes, and not to aid in reporting the war. The importance of the commercial cities at the time helped to determine the route the line would follow. From Charleston the line went to Augusta, then back to Savannah, from there to Macon and on to Columbus. The New Orleans Picayune assured its readers the "circuititous route will not hurt the telegraph since (it) is instantaneous."<sup>68</sup> When the line reached Petersburg, the papers discovered telegraphed messages could leave New York as much as a day and a half later than the mail, and still catch the same delivery at Petersburg. This savings was cut back in December, 1847, however, when the Post Office had a cost dispute with the railroad company which carried the mails from Washington to Portsmouth, Virginia. Despite protests by papers North and South, the government switched the deliveries to small coastal steamers running between Baltimore and Portsmouth. The boats,



particularly slow and unreliable in the winter months, added a day to the mail service, the papers estimated.<sup>69</sup> Work on the lines came to a halt in late Summer, 1847 when a severe yellow fever epidemic hit Louisiana and other Gulf area states. The outbreak reached its peak in August and September. Progress on the line didn't resume until late October. It was announced in early November that the New Orleans-to-Mobile link should be open by the end of the month, the Picayune observing, "During a summer as that just passed we are not disposed to show any impatience."<sup>70</sup> By that time the major events of the war were over. Work on the line continued throughout early 1848, but the full New York-to-New Orleans link was not completed until July 18, 1848.<sup>71</sup>

Steamboats were another key link in the long communication system between the armies and the public at home. They were particularly vital in crossing the Gulf of Mexico between the Mexican ports and the American entry points of New Orleans and the naval base at Pensacola, Florida. Other key boat links were up and down the Mississippi River between New Orleans and St. Louis and the Ohio Valley cities, and along the coast between Charleston and Washington and Baltimore.

At the beginning of the war the mail boats from Charleston came up the Potomac River, stopping first at Alexandria, Virginia, and then Washington. When they stopped at Alexandria, the news would be given to an express rider, who carried it to the telegraph office in Washington, approximately nine miles. This system allowed the summaries to be on the wires to Baltimore

before the boat reached the Washington wharf. From Baltimore it was relayed north, usually reaching Philadelphia and New York by 5:30 p.m.<sup>72</sup> If a boat was carrying important news it flew flags to signal the waiting reporters.<sup>73</sup> When the news reached Washington by steamboat that Taylor had been victorious at Buena Vista, the Baltimore Sun reported the news

was fully anticipated so soon as the steamer Powhatten turned the channel at Ft. Washington, as (its) captain had covered it with flags.

John R. Martin, one of the most efficient and indefatigable mail agents, immediately on the arrival of the boat at the wharf, announced the substance of the news to the (crowd) and it was conveyed to the telegraph office in double-quick time for the Sun by James McWilliams, an old, successful and energetic mail contractor, who was determined to have the honor to first apprise Baltimore of the victory....<sup>74</sup>

From the New Orleans newspaper offices, bundled papers were quickly taken down to the city's many wharves for shipment up the river on steamboats. These boats also frequently flew special flags to indicate "the news was aboard." Author-painter Thomas Bangs Thorpe was visiting at the farm of Zachary Taylor in June, 1848 when a copy of the Picayune arrived with the word of the general's presidential nomination by the Whig party. The paper came so promptly, Thorpe wrote, "that the swift winged messengers of the mighty press kept pace with the impatient wish to hear" the news.<sup>75</sup> Regarding the boats, a reporter at St. Louis noted:

The appearance of a boat coming up the river is a signal for a general rush to the Levee, and then such pulling and pushing to get on board,

and such questioning, and shouting, such a blowing off of steam, and reading of 'Extras'.... Such a general excitement was never known before.<sup>76</sup>

The daily St. Louis Reveille, a small but lively penny paper which promised to give its readers "a good rub-a-dub-dub every morning," explained how stories were handled on the boats.

Charles Keemle, senior editor of the Reveille, was in New Orleans on one occasion when the news of a Taylor victory arrived. He purchased as many local papers as he could, boarded a steamboat, wrote a synopsis from the New Orleans publications and had it set in type before the boat reached St. Louis. The Reveille claimed its extra edition was on the street "within 10 minutes" after Keemle's arrival.<sup>77</sup>

With such enterprise the newspapers constantly trimmed days off the time it took to carry news from the armies to the public at home. In May, 1846 it took 19 days for the news of Taylor's first battles at the mouth of the Rio Grande to reach Washington. By the war's end in Summer, 1848 news was carried from Mexico City, deep in the interior, to Washington in 17 days.<sup>78</sup> By combining the abilities of pony express, steamboats, telegraph and rail lines, the press was able to fulfill its role of serving the public demand for news of the war's events. In the process it repeatedly beat the efforts of government couriers to reach Washington, and the nation, first. The press' intelligent utilization of the nation's existing communication resources, together with the unique addition of eye-witness battlefield reports, was to become an irresistible combination for the public.

## NOTES

1. Extensive biographical information on Morse is included in Robert Luther Thomson, Wiring A Continent: The History of the Telegraph Industry in The United States, 1832-1866 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947).
2. Ibid., Chaps. 1-12.
3. Ibid., p. 143.
4. For an extensive treatment of the development of American communication channels during this period see George Rogers Taylor, The Transportation Revolution, 1815-1860, (New York: Harper & Row, 1951).
5. New Orleans Picayune, May 1, 1846.
6. Ibid., July 16, 1846.
7. New Orleans Delta, April 30, 1846.
8. Ibid., September 13, 1846.
9. Ibid., January 1, 1847.
10. Ibid., April 2, 1847.
11. New Orleans Picayune, November 11, 1846. Italics are in the original.
12. Ibid., July 16,17, 1846; The Delta, July 16, 1846, supported this argument.
13. New Orleans Picayune, September 22, 1846.
14. New Orleans Delta, April 22, 1847.
15. Ibid., July 29, 1847.
16. Wayne E. Fuller, The American Mail, Enlarger of the Common Life (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1972), p. 112.
17. Ibid.
18. New Orleans Crescent, March 5, 1848.
19. Charleston Courier, February 3, 1847.
20. Quoted in Ibid., August 13, 1845.

21. Ibid., January 4, 1846.
22. Fuller, op. cit., pp.112-13.
23. Quoted in Augusta (Georgia) Chronicle and Sentinel, October 14, 1847.
24. New Orleans Delta, February 5, 1847.
25. New Orleans Picayune, November 25, 1847.
26. New Orleans Delta, December 25, 1845.
27. Fuller, op. cit., p. 48.
28. Ibid., pp. 116-18.
29. Ibid., p. 116.
30. For a story on the "popularity" of the Sun's ponies, see Baltimore Sun, July 21, 1847.
31. Fuller, op. cit., p. 57.
32. For discussion of the problem with private expresses see Ibid., p. 162; Also Wayne E. Fuller, RFD, The Changing Face of Rural America (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964), p. 12.
33. New Orleans Picayune, May 1, 1846.
34. Ibid.
35. For a valuable study of press practices at this time see Richard A. Schwarzlose, "Early Telegraphic News Dispatches: The Forerunner of the AP," Journalism Quarterly, 51 (Winter 1974) 4: 595-601.
36. New Orleans Picayune, May 1, 1846.
37. See New Orleans Picayune, Baltimore Sun, Augusta Chronicle and Sentinel and Charleston Courier for this period.
38. This information is assembled from the extensive newspaper research conducted as part of the present study.
39. New York Sun, June 4, 1848.
40. Augusta Chronicle and Sentinel, January 6, 1848.
41. New Orleans Picayune, January 25, 1848.

42. Charleston Courier, September 14, 1847.
43. Ibid., April 8, 1847.
44. Ibid., June 1, 1847.
45. Ibid., June 22, 1847.
46. Quoted in Washington Union, May 17, 1847.
47. Baltimore Sun, May 18, 1847.
48. Quoted in Ibid., May 27, 1847.
49. Ibid.
50. Gerald W. Johnson, et. al., The Sunpapers of Baltimore (New York: Knopf, 1937), pp. 80-2.
51. Quaife, ed., Polk Diary, op. cit., II: 465.
52. Ibid., III: 35.
53. Ibid.
54. Quoted in New Orleans Picayune, October 3, 1846.
55. John Bassett Moore, ed., The Works of James Buchanan, 11 vols., New York: Antiquarian Press, Ltd., 1960), VII: 129.
56. Charleston Courier, March 6, 1848.
57. Thompson, op. cit., p. 44.
58. Ibid., p. 51.
59. Ibid., p. 52.
60. Philadelphia North American, May 20, 1846.
61. Quoted in New Orleans Delta, May 23, 1846.
62. Charleston Courier, November 17, 1846.
63. Philadelphia North American, March 30, 1847.
64. The telegraph competition is discussed at length in Thompson, op. cit., Chaps. 3, 8.
65. Ibid., p. 53. William Swain of the Philadelphia Public Ledger was an early investor in the telegraph's development. Ibid., p. 48.

66. Ibid., p. 138.
67. Ibid., p. 143.
68. New Orleans Picayune, July 7, 1847.
69. Ibid., December 1,7,12,14, 1847.
70. Ibid., November 3, 1847.
71. Ibid., July 19, 1848. The line did not work reliably until early 1849, however.
72. Ibid., July 2, 1846.
73. Baltimore Sun, March 31, 1847.
74. Ibid.
75. New Orleans Picayune, June 20, 1848.
76. Quoted in New Orleans Delta, June 3, 1846.
77. St. Louis Reveille, March 23, 1847.
78. For an example see Washington Union, February 21, 1848.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE NEW ORLEANS PRESS

#### "The Newsboy"

"The Delta, sir?" the newsboy cried —  
The Pic and Delta here they go  
The latest English news, beside  
Another fight in Mexico!

.....

Our boys have had another fight  
With Santa Anna's mongrel crew —  
The British money market's tight —  
The royal household's in a stew —  
And it is whispered that old Zack —  
God bless him! — Has the inside track.<sup>1</sup>

This poem from the New Orleans Delta provides a clue to the news mixture which the highly competitive New Orleans papers used to good advantage throughout the Mexican War. During the 1840s New Orleans was the fourth largest city in the United States, and its strategic location at the mouth of the Mississippi River made it one of the nation's busiest seaports.<sup>2</sup> The city's commercial activities were so diversified that 26 nations had consuls stationed there during the war.<sup>3</sup> Because of the proximity of Texas and Mexico, and the expansionist movements of a number of Americans, the city's papers had long given special coverage to Mexican and Texan affairs. With the outbreak of fighting in May, 1846 the city became the funnel through which American men and equipment moved en route to the battle areas.



As a result the papers responded to the news events in their midst and steadily enlarged their leadership role in the war's coverage.

The New Orleans press, dating from 1803, had long been one of the most colorful in the nation.<sup>4</sup> Frederic Hudson, the former New York Herald managing editor turned journalism historian, observed in 1872, "New Orleans...has always been an important place for journalism."<sup>5</sup> At various times during the Mexican War twelve daily papers published in the city: the Picayune, Delta, Tropic, Crescent, National, Courier, Bee, Bulletin, Jeffersonian, Commercial Times, Republican and Evening Mercury.<sup>6</sup> A historian of New Orleans life during this period has explained how it was possible to have so many newspapers in the city:

The founding of a new paper in the middle forties did not require great financial investment. Only the larger journals had rotary, power driven presses. For the smaller ones, the type was set by hand from two or more compartmented cases. Once set, the type was locked into frames. From these the sheets could be printed by a hand-operated press. Such equipment could easily be bought at second hand from defunct sheets, or more often, from established papers wishing to improve their appearance with fresh, new type.

In addition to being able to establish their publications on a shoestring, the New Orleans papers exhibited energy and zest. When a new daily, the National, opened in June, 1847 the Charleston Courier noted New Orleans had "one Democratic daily, two Whig and four neutral -- all fighting."<sup>8</sup> The Philadelphia North American, a vigorous daily in its own right, observed, "The

press of the Crescent City...occupies as elevated a position as that of any other city and is distinguished for its energy and ability...."<sup>9</sup> The people of New Orleans had good newspapers, according to the Savannah Georgian, "because they know how to patronize them."<sup>10</sup> The Washington Union, the Administration's paper, often called attention during the war to the work of the New Orleans journalists, observing, "we are indebted to the New Orleans press for the more interesting details" of the events.<sup>11</sup> Representative of other newspaper comments was an editorial in the New York Courier and Enquirer which stated:

We cannot forebear to express our high admiration of the spirit and enterprise which the New Orleans press has exhibited in obtaining news since the commencement of the Mexican war. All the papers have done themselves credit, but we...specially commend the Picayune and Delta for the remarkable efforts they have put forth...The London Times has never evinced more zeal or enterprise than have been shown by these journals.<sup>12</sup>

The Picayune, although it did not cost a penny, was the first penny paper in the South. It was started January 25, 1837, by George Wilkins Kendall and Francis A. Lumsden, two young printers from the east. When the Picayune started there were five other daily newspapers in the city, but all cost 10 cents. The Picayune cost a picayune, which was 6 1/4 cents. A picayune was a Spanish silver coin, the half real.<sup>13</sup> The paper quickly caught on, and during the Mexican War built up its regular daily and weekly circulation to 5,500. The weekly was particularly influential throughout the Southwest (not unlike the New York Tribune in the old Northwest). The paper became a spokesman for

expansionism, Texas annexation and settlement of the Southwest problems with Mexico and Great Britain, by war if necessary.<sup>14</sup>

The Picayune had started running pony expresses from the East as early as 1838 in order to speed the delivery of news. It established a joint express with the Baltimore Sun and other eastern papers during the Mexican War which repeatedly beat the mail by 24 to 72 hours.<sup>15</sup> Until the telegraph reached Richmond in 1847, the newspaper express went by train between Baltimore and Washington, then by train, boat, stage and horseback to Mobile, Alabama. At that point it went on a boat to New Orleans. To speed the process, the Picayune put printers on the steamers which carried the mail from Mobile. When the vessels docked the news was in type, ready to be run off as soon as the small connecting rail line between the docks and New Orleans (four-and-a-half miles) could deliver the forms to the press.<sup>16</sup>

Such enterprise moved the Picayune into the leadership of the New Orleans press. It thrived on the competition, continually promising its readers it would serve them better. "Let us be judged by our acts," it stated.<sup>17</sup> The New York Sun described the Picayune as "one of the ablest and best, as well as profitable newspapers in the country," and praised its Mexico coverage as "valuable and able."<sup>18</sup> The Charleston Courier believed the Picayune to be better "informed on all matters connected with (Mexico)" than any other paper in the country.<sup>19</sup> On another occasion, when the Mexican cities of Jalapa and Perote were occupied by American forces, the Courier stated the prompt

report of the event "is from our enterprising friends of the Picayune...who are ever on the alert to obtain and forward early intelligence."<sup>20</sup>

Kendall and Lumsden were northern men — they had worked on a number of Eastern seaboard papers as printers and reporters—and had a good knowledge of the new machinery and techniques (such as police court reporting) which were transforming the penny press. Kendall was born in Mt. Vernon, New Hampshire, in 1809 and worked at various times on the Boston Statesman, in Washington for the National Intelligencer and the United States Telegraph (Duff Green's), and for New York newspapers and the New Orleans True American.<sup>21</sup> He met Lumsden while they were working at the National Intelligencer, where Lumsden was a reporter-printer for nine years. When they pooled their journalistic experience by founding the Picayune Kendall was 27 and Lumsden 37. Kendall later wrote, "All the money I had when I started the Picayune was \$75, (and Lumsden was about that much in debt.) Such was our capital."<sup>22</sup> Their relationship was a success from the start and they remained close friends until Lumsden's death in 1860.<sup>23</sup>

Since Kendall spent most of the Mexican War in the field, organizing the paper's network of correspondents and express riders, and sending back detailed reports about the war's major battles, the Picayune editorial staff in New Orleans also played a crucial part in the paper's coverage. Lumsden headed this up for part of the war, and during periods he was away co-editors A.C. Bullitt and A.M. Holbrook coordinated the editorial

activities.<sup>24</sup>

The Picayune took a hard line against Mexico throughout the war. Before fighting even started it editorialized:

(Should Mexico) attempt to invade Texas, she must be met promptly and efficiently and the lesson inculcated must be one that will be remembered throughout all time....the city of Mexico is but four hundred miles distant...and in a few short weeks the capital of the Montezumas may witness the approach of that Anglo-Saxon race whose destiny it is to subjugate and occupy the entire continent of North America.<sup>25</sup>

In other editorials the Picayune frequently warned against European designs on Mexico,<sup>26</sup> campaigned for higher pay for soldiers,<sup>27</sup> and asked Congress to vote special medals for the veterans of the battles as "a talisman which will surely prove a passport to the regard and confidence of (our) countrymen."<sup>28</sup> The most important contribution of the Picayune, however, was not its editorial positions, but its scope and depth of reporting of the war's main events. By combining Kendall's own articles with those of a number of other correspondents, the paper provided the country with its most comprehensive and informed picture of the two-year struggle.

The New Orleans Daily Delta, which was to be the Picayune's principal competitor throughout the war, started on October 12, 1845. It was formed by a group of former Picayune employees — Denis (sic) Corcoran, M.G. Davis, A.H. Hayes and J.E. McClure. Corcoran was a popular and gifted court reporter and sketch writer who had provided the Picayune much of its color and creative writing during its formative years.<sup>29</sup> He transferred

his ability to his own paper, and it soon took on the appearance and style of the Picayune -- in other words, the Picayune formula.

Since the new group were all former Picayune men, the latter announced a bit proudly as they departed:

Each department will be controlled by a partner who has had long experience in its particular cares and requirements as well as intimate familiarity with the general conduct of a paper....It proprietors are men of sense... (and) have qualified themselves by faithful service in the best of all schools -- that of experience at the business....<sup>30</sup>

An editorial on the first date of issue declared the Delta to be "strictly neutral."<sup>31</sup> Events of the war and the predilections of the editors, however, made the paper pro-Democratic, and as the war continued the Delta became increasingly involved in political battles with its contemporaries.<sup>32</sup> The Delta finally admitted it wasn't going to be "a neutral press," as the party press attempted to classify the independent papers. "To hold and express no opinion upon questions of national concern is to be faithless to the trusts of Republicanism and the obligation of patriotism," a Delta editorial explained.<sup>33</sup>

The Delta had a broad interpretation for the news it selected: "We shall not rest content...with making the Delta a mere gazette, filled only with details of news. We shall strive to make it efficient in the promotion of virtue, of morality, of science, of education, of patriotism and national duty."<sup>34</sup> Regarding its Mexican War coverage, the paper explained:

Our main object is to make the Delta a faithful history of the times, so that it may be filed

and placed in libraries for future reference. Especially in regard to that most interesting event on this continent, the Mexican war, we seek to present full and authentic details so that our successive volumes may present the best history extant of the war....<sup>35</sup>

Although it admitted openly the cost of the Mexican coverage was quite "heavy," the Delta didn't complain; it stated, "We trust the public will see an earnest of our desire to continue to deserve the very handsome support which we have received from a liberal and appreciating public."<sup>36</sup>

The paper's business picked up so sharply after the start of the war that it sent Hayes to New York to buy a new Hoe double-cylinder press.<sup>37</sup> "Increasing advertising patronage" was cited by the paper when it added a seventh column to its pages in January, 1847. The page size did not increase, however; the proprietors accommodated their advertisers by reducing the column width and making greater use of agate type for news.<sup>38</sup> The new Hoe press finally started operating in January, 1848. It was capable of 6,000 impressions an hour and the paper proudly announced, "It is the size and capacity used by the London Times."<sup>39</sup> At the same time the Delta claimed its daily circulation was "near 4,000" and its weekly circulation "near 6,000" and growing by 15 to 20 daily.<sup>40</sup>

The Delta also showed a high degree of competitiveness in attempting to be first with the news. When President Polk's important annual message of December, 1845 arrived at Mobile, the Delta made arrangements with the New Orleans Tropic to have the speech set in type on board the steamboat Creole, which carried

it to New Orleans. When the boat arrived at 3:30 a.m. the two papers were ready to start printing, and their first copies were on the street by 4 a.m., "two hours before anyone else," the Delta claimed.<sup>41</sup> On at least one occasion during the war an extra edition of the paper was printed in Vera Cruz and distributed in New Orleans after it arrived there by boat. The paper noted the edition was prepared by "our agent in Vera Cruz in view of the importance of the news."<sup>42</sup>

The Delta served another important function during the war when it became a clearing house for the government's official military dispatches, which were being forwarded by the paper's principal correspondent in Mexico. On one occasion the paper noted that along with its regular letters from the army it had received General Scott's official battle reports and had promptly forwarded them to Washington. "We may now, without any violation of confidence state" this, the paper boasted.<sup>43</sup> The paper later explained it had received many of Scott's war messages and forwarded them to Washington. "Nearly all of the official dispatches from the army to the government have been brought by our couriers and passed through our office at our own expense," the paper reported.<sup>44</sup>

The Delta's policy towards Mexico, like that of the other New Orleans papers, was blatantly hostile. At the beginning of 1846 it wished publicly that Mexico would "do the right thing." If not, the paper stated, "A few bombs tossed into Vera Cruz would be a most convincing argument of the folly of her course."<sup>45</sup>



When the news of the fighting at the border reached New Orleans the paper editorialized:

The soil of the United States had been invaded, some of its citizens have been killed, more have been captured. It is a disgrace. It must be wiped out....we must avenge our slaughtered, we must rescue the prisoners, we must vindicate our honor....<sup>46</sup>

Several weeks later the paper was happy to note most of the country's editors, except "the fanatical few," agreed with it that it "should be a big and brief war...as a demonstration to other and more arrogant nations of the immensity of our power and the magnitude of our resources."<sup>47</sup>

After the fall of Monterrey when some northern newspapers suggested the government should negotiate a settlement of the war, the Delta rebutted, "A vigorous invasion is the only means of conquering a peace."<sup>48</sup> The Boston Journal in particular thought the price of taking Vera Cruz would be too high, but the Delta answered sarcastically, "The attempt of some of the 'Boston patriots' to make heroes of the Mexicans will, we fear, prove one of the most difficult undertakings of the age."<sup>49</sup> The Delta was particularly vehement regarding European interest in Mexico. "Self-preservation demands from us prompt and efficient resistance" to all European interests "in this continent," the paper wrote.<sup>50</sup>

Among other positions the Delta took were "applying the Monroe Doctrine to keep Europeans out of the American continent;"<sup>51</sup> using a draft "as the only fair, honest and effective way of raising an army;"<sup>52</sup> higher pay and land bounties for

soldiers;<sup>53</sup> officers commissions for non-commissioned officers who distinguished themselves on the battlefield;<sup>54</sup> urging the states of northern Mexico to "voluntarily annex themselves" to the United States, which it said would "meet with a very general approval in this section of the country"<sup>55</sup> and urging better treatment of the volunteers by the army.<sup>56</sup>

As the American advantage grew stronger, the Delta's position regarding Mexico became bolder. "Given the chance, all of Mexico will want to annex to the United States," the paper argued, particularly,

When well informed of the object and character of our political institutions, when told of the unbounded personal and religious freedom, of the well protected political rights, of the safe guaranty of our flag.<sup>57</sup>

"Slaves in the American South" were infinitely better off than the "poor and laboring classes of Mexico," the Delta insisted.<sup>58</sup> The paper finally moved to a policy of demanding that all of Mexico be occupied and annexed.<sup>59</sup> As the war wound down to its final days, a Delta editorial summed up what the paper believed America had gained from the conflict:

1-An extent of territory that won't be filled for a century; 2-A reputation in arms that will make her respected by foreign powers; 3-Knowledge that volunteers are a force to rely on for defense or attack; 4-A consciousness of her strength and resources; 5-A conviction that the strength of the union and stability of the country are preserved.<sup>60</sup>

In March, 1848 another penny paper -- the Crescent -- came into existence and competed successfully against the Picayune and the Delta during the closing months of the war. The Crescent

was started by a spinoff from the original Picayune group which had started the Delta. A.H. Hayes and J.E. McClure, who had joined the founders of the Delta in October, 1845, subsequently left that publication and started their own.<sup>61</sup> In a "Declaration of Independence" in their first issue the new publishers explained:

(We) believe that a journal devoted to the great interests of New Orleans and the South-West, which combine all the advantages of a general and accurate newspaper with enlarged and liberal views on subjects connected with our commercial enterprises and agriculture industry, which, divested of all party politics, would discuss the great questions of State and National policy with impartiality and freedom, and which, adapting itself to the spirit of the age, should be furnished at a price which placed it within the reach of all classes of society, could be furnished to them, and would be supported....<sup>62</sup>

The Crescent's objective was to take the middle of the road between the pro-Whig Picayune and the pro-Democrat Delta. "There is room for us all, without in the least stepping on each others toes," the new paper argued.<sup>63</sup> The publishers concluded, "The Crescent will take no side in the party contests of the day, either directly or indirectly. But upon important questions, involving the welfare or the honor of the country, it will freely and fully express the opinions of its conductors, regardless of what (others) may think or do."<sup>64</sup>

The Crescent faithfully carried out the Picayune formula -- it looked exactly like its rival, and carried a similar mixture of hard news, commercial and shipping information, and tidbits of humor and gossip. Its position on the war was similar

to that of the Delta and Picayune — that is, it was hawkish. When the U.S. Senate accepted the controversial peace treaty ending the war in March, 1848 the paper, unhappy with the document's acceptance, stated, "The tragedy is over and the curtain has risen on the first act of the farce. Mr. [Nicholas P.] Trist has humbugged the President, the President has humbugged the Senate, and the Senate has humbugged the people."<sup>65</sup> When the war finally came to an end in May, 1848 the Crescent again took a dour view of events: "That the peace is honorable to this country we will not assert — indeed the less said upon that point, the better for all parties; that it will be lasting, we cannot for a moment believe....The treaty is a tolerable cover under which to back out from our position, and abandon some costly and troublesome acquisitions — but that is all...."<sup>66</sup>

When it started the paper took immediate steps to establish correspondence from Mexico which was equal to that of the Picayune and Delta. It made arrangements with John N. Peoples, an experienced correspondent who had a national reputation writing under the pseudonym "Chaparral." He had reported the war for more than a year for the Delta and had been instrumental in setting up several American newspapers in Mexico. (Peoples' reporting is discussed in Chapters 9 and 17). It obtained the services of Peoples, the Crescent explained, because he "is unsurpassed in enterprise, energy and correct views of Mexican affairs."<sup>67</sup> Despite its late entry, the paper soon was rivaling its older competitors in delivering news from the army.

Another New Orleans paper which covered the war closely, although it relied primarily on occasional correspondents, was the Commercial Times. It was started November 1, 1845, as a daily paper "devoted to commerce, agriculture, literature and the arts...the causes of the mercantile and agricultural classes" of New Orleans.<sup>68</sup> Its editor was Thomas Bangs Thorpe, a noted painter and writer in the Old Southwest School.<sup>69</sup> J.J. Hawkins was assistant editor, Lewis Heylinger, an experienced New Orleans journalist, served as its commercial editor and was also co-owner together with Charles Black and David Bravo.<sup>70</sup>

The Commercial Times's format was well suited to a busy port city like New Orleans, which had a heavy flow of commercial traffic. The paper placed heavy emphasis on commercial and shipping news, commercial directories, financial reports, import and export statistics and advertisements related to shipping.<sup>71</sup> Although it did not send a correspondent with the armies, it provided heavy coverage of the military throughout the war, and was particularly effective in its coverage of the Gulf fleet. The paper also was interested in developing the express routes and the telegraph to the north, but primarily for the commercial value these had for New Orleans, rather than coverage of the war.<sup>72</sup>

Its first editor, Thorpe, was the author of two noted fiction stories, "Tom Owen, the Bee Hunter," and the "Big Bear of Arkansas," which had been reprinted widely in American and European papers.<sup>73</sup> As a noted literary figure, Thorpe was

popular with most of the New Orleans press, and usually was referred to by the pseudonym "Tom Owen, the Bee Hunter." When he left the Commercial Times to join another New Orleans daily, the Tropic, the Delta called Thorpe "a gentleman, scholar and honest man."<sup>74</sup> Thorpe moved to the Tropic at the beginning of April, 1846. He bought out the interest of Benjamin F. Flanders, New Orleans high school principal and Whig politician.<sup>75</sup> Robert Sawyer and Charles E. Hall continued as equal partners in the Tropic, which had started in October, 1842. Although it had a strong Whig flavor, the paper also supported the nativist American movement in Louisiana. Not as financially strong or colorful as the Picayune and Delta, the Tropic still had a good reputation with the other New Orleans editors, and the Eastern press.<sup>76</sup> Thorpe helped the paper particularly at the beginning of the war by going to Taylor's camp on the Rio Grande and writing extensive articles about the general and the war's opening battles. (See Chapter 5).

The Tropic, despite its popularity with the Eastern papers, had financial troubles at home, and in late August, 1846 ceased publication. Thorpe dropped out of active involvement at that time, and when it was able to resume on September 17, 1846, Sawyer and Hall were the sole owners.<sup>79</sup> The Tropic stopped and started a number of times during the war. Whenever its support fell off it stopped, but it always managed to begin again. "The Tropic has large influence," the New Orleans Delta observed, "because Sawyer never allows it to descend to 'scurrility.'"<sup>80</sup>

It was suspended again at the start of May, 1847, although the Delta among others had warm praise for its new editor, James M. McRea.<sup>81</sup> After this failure the paper finally underwent a reorganization, and resumed in June, 1847 as the New Orleans National. Thorpe was back as editor and its flavor was "Whig, all Whig," the Delta observed.<sup>82</sup> McRea joined Thorpe as a co-editor in October of that year.<sup>83</sup>

The new National clearly identified its purpose. At the top of the page two editorial column was a bold-face type line: "For President of the U.S. Zachary Taylor." Thorpe took no active part in reporting the war as he had with the Tropic, and the paper felt no reluctance in reprinting Kendall's war dispatches from the Picayune.<sup>84</sup> Thorpe left the National in December, 1847, ironically succeeded once again by McRea.<sup>85</sup> The National later became an evening daily, and in February, 1848 was taken over by A.C. Russell, who maintained its strong pro-Taylor stance.<sup>86</sup>

Another New Orleans paper which played a role in the war's coverage was the Evening Mercury. In October, 1846, William C. Jones, owner of the New Orleans Bulletin, sold that paper to another veteran New Orleans editor, William L. Hodge, in order to establish a new paper in the afternoon market.<sup>87</sup> The paper — the Evening Mercury — made its debut on November 9, 1846.<sup>88</sup> Associated with Jones was another experienced New Orleans editor, C.R. Sessions.<sup>89</sup> The Picayune said the Evening Mercury was publishing in the afternoon "because the field is more

open."<sup>90</sup> Another benefit, the Picayune noted, was the late arrival of the Eastern mail "that makes an abstract of the news desireable on the same day instead of the following one." Added to the abstract of the Eastern mail, the Mercury included "a diversity of light reading suited to the family circle."<sup>91</sup>

As an afternoon daily the Evening Mercury had another advantage over its morning rivals — if important news arrived from the war zones during the day it didn't have to worry about assembling its staff in order to put out an extra edition. The paper also became proficient at running expresses from the point where boats entered the Mississippi to New Orleans, about 60 miles. By running these short expresses, and having its staff already on hand, it was able to be first on the streets with the news after several of the war's major battles, even though the more established Picayune and Delta had gone to the greater expense of sending correspondents to the front and expressing the news all the way back to New Orleans. "It's frequently the first to publish news of interest," the rival New Orleans Crescent, noted, attributing it to the staff's editorial ability.<sup>92</sup> The rest of the American-owned New Orleans dailies were primarily political newspapers, and as such, did not participate actively in obtaining war news.

However, the English-language newspapers of New Orleans received strong competition in their war coverage from a controversial, outspoken contemporary which printed in Spanish — La Patria. The paper had been started in September, 1845 as a



weekly, then named El Hablador. It reorganized in January, 1846 as La Patria, publishing three times a week and using the larger format of the English-language dailies. The publication primarily emphasized commercial news about Cuba, Mexico and Central and South America.<sup>93</sup> Editors and co-owners of La Patria were E.J. Gomez and V. Aléman. "It is conducted by a society of able and intelligent writers," the Delta commented.<sup>94</sup>

The paper quickly built up a chain of Spanish speaking correspondents in Havana, Vera Cruz, Tampico, Mexico City, the Yucatan and other Latin American cities. The paper specialized in rapid translations from the Mexican newspapers when they came to New Orleans, and often made its efforts available to the other New Orleans newspapers, sometimes even before using the items itself.<sup>95</sup> Another advantage La Patria had over its contemporaries was its chain of correspondents, particularly in Mexico, where most American newspapers could not establish contacts.<sup>96</sup> After the Americans occupied Tampico in late 1846 La Patria greatly expanded its coverage of the Mexican newspapers by establishing a correspondent in that port city. The paper later noted this correspondent "has never failed (us) since we started this costly arrangement."<sup>97</sup> When Vera Cruz fell in Spring, 1847 La Patria established a regular correspondent there, and the New Orleans papers benefitted from his shipment of newspapers and letters as well.<sup>98</sup>

La Patria also conducted interviews with Spanish-speaking merchants and diplomats passing through New Orleans, and printed

biographical sketches on leading Mexican military and political leaders, who generally were unknown to the American public.<sup>99</sup> it beat its contemporaries so frequently with news from the Mexican newspapers that it published "extras" on occasion.<sup>100</sup> As the war continued, however, La Patria increasingly became the target of attacks by American newspapers. One explanation for the attacks was La Patria's frequent pro-Mexican editorials. Another was its occasional erroneous reporting, which trapped many American newspapers in the same mistake because of the wide practice of reprinting La Patria's foreign correspondence.

The Spanish-language paper also caught criticism for repeated, incorrect predictions that peace was imminent. It even issued an extra on one occasion in September, 1847, months before the war ended, announcing a peace treaty had been signed at Mexico City.<sup>101</sup> After using this item the Washington Union commented, "It is the least reliable of any journal now published and has frequently been detected in the grossest blunders."<sup>102</sup> La Patria published a special edition on July 4, 1847, printed in gold ink, causing the Charleston Courier to comment, "It really makes a beautiful show." The Courier added, however, "This journal seems to have a way of getting the latest Mexican news, tho', as in the case of the other (New Orleans) journals, a very large portion of it turns out to be incorrect."<sup>103</sup> The Philadelphia North American, in republishing some La Patria items, told its readers:

We give the above intelligence as we have received it, and place confidence in its truth-

fulness only in accordance with the known character of the paper from which it is extracted for exaggerations relative to the Mexican intelligence.<sup>104</sup>

La Patria was particularly strong in its support for Cuba, and this position also eroded its supporters among the American press. When the American Navy captured the Mexican ports of Tabasco and Tampico in November, 1846 La Patria called the victories "insignificant." The reaction of the New Orleans editors was instantaneous. A bitter rebuttal by the Delta suggested any one of the 30 American states could defeat Cuba or Mexico.<sup>105</sup> La Patria also had a running feud through most of the war with the influential Picayune, often presenting the Mexican side of pro-American war arguments appearing in the Picayune. In May, 1847 the two papers got into a dispute over the condition of American prisoners in Mexico. It started when the New Orleans Commercial Times published a letter to Santa Anna from five imprisoned American officers in Mexico City, asking improvements in their prison's condition.<sup>106</sup> When a Picayune editorial supported this demand, La Patria stated the Picayune shouldn't comment on it because it didn't "possess the facts." The Picayune replied sarcastically, "La Patria will next deny outright that these American captives have been imprisoned at all." Such arguments were to "the advantage of the enemy," the Picayune added.<sup>107</sup>

Soon after, La Patria and several other New Orleans newspapers printed reports obtained from paroled Mexican army officers, who were living in New Orleans, that American prisoners in Mexico were not mistreated. The Picayune fumed, "Is not this as

near the limit of reasonable impunity as men can get?...Instead of being allowed to be at large in the city, making false and contradictory reports to the newspapers, they should be put in... prison, as Americans are in Mexico."<sup>108</sup> Another Picayune editorial stated, "The captivity of Mexican prisoners has been made pleasant by indulgences, whilst American prisoners have been dealt with as felons." Additionally, the paper argued, the paroled Mexicans "spread their scandalous calumnies" about the American prisoners "on the wings of the American press."<sup>109</sup> As part of its campaign for better treatment for American prisoners, another Picayune article began: "We had the pleasure of an interview with Mr. Trenwitt, a merchant who was taken prisoner (by the Mexicans)." The article quoted Trenwitt as saying, "The prisoners were subjected to needless humiliation and cruelty on their march to Mexico, and when there subjected to cruel privations."<sup>110</sup>

La Patria became the center of a national controversy in December, 1846 when it ran an article headed "The War - New Plan of Operations."<sup>111</sup> It started:

The war with Mexico continues to be for our colleagues throughout the Union the favorite subject, and one which affords the means of filling columns and sheets without number. But among the thousands of writers who actually present us their opinions in type, there are scarcely two of them who agree or link their ideas together. Each of them believes himself an experienced general, capable of directing from his editorial table the operations of the army, and penning out, in a few strokes, the best of campaigns.<sup>112</sup>

Gomez then proceeded to state what he believed to be the correct

plan of war, although admitting "these affairs are yet enveloped in the thick veil of mystery." The reported plan was fairly accurate. What gave some credence to the subsequent allegations of "spying" against Gomez was that he had been chosen by General Scott, on his arrival at New Orleans, to serve as an interpreter with the invasion force. The appointment quickly drew complaints from a number of New Orleans political leaders, who did not like La Patria's war policy. As a result Scott withdrew the appointment.

Both Scott and Gomez denied the spying allegations, but the coincidence of the editor's brief acquaintance with the general was too much for a number of editors to ignore. It particularly became an issue when Senator Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri said it was the war plan with which he was acquainted.<sup>113</sup> Even President Polk apparently believed it, jotting anti-Scott comments in his diary after hearing of the La Patria story.<sup>114</sup>

Gomez replied to the charges by stating he had gathered all the information from other papers. "Nothing of my own invention will be found in it — but a few remarks which come naturally to a mind that is not disposed to favor either party," he stated.<sup>115</sup> Gomez was particularly stung by some newspaper comments which indicated he was not suited for the Scott assignment because he and his paper were "anti-American." He called a correspondent of the Charleston Courier a "slanderer" and defended himself in a letter to that paper:

Should those articles that are represented as being anti-American be analyzed carefully

they would be found less treacherous than some which have appeared in the national papers which claim patriotism and fidelity.<sup>116</sup>

In rebuttal the Courier explained:

Men high in station must expect to be closely observed, and anything connected with movements of Gen. Scott or other distinguished officers are fair subjects of newspaper comment.<sup>117</sup>

Gomez was not discouraged by the criticism — he came back with another article, titled "Another Plan of Operation," which gave fairly accurate details of the planned landing at Vera Cruz. It was obtained from "reliable sources," he assured his readers.<sup>118</sup>

La Patria often did not receive its Mexican newspaper deliveries, and it finally was forced to complain publicly of its treatment by the New Orleans post office.<sup>119</sup> Aléman and Gomez offered a \$100 reward "for the apprehension of anyone stealing (our) files of Spanish and Mexican newspapers." In an advertisement in the New Orleans Delta they complained the foreign papers "often never reach our hands." They stated they had even tried sending the papers "under cover to a friend's address to avoid theft, but it doesn't seem to work."<sup>120</sup> Aléman also was threatened physically several times and the Delta reported he carried a sword-cane for protection.<sup>121</sup>

Another foreign language newspaper in the United States which was widely quoted during the war was the French-language Courrier des Etats Unis (United States Courier) of New York City.<sup>122</sup> It, too, maintained good sources in Mexico where the Americans could not. The French-language Franco-American of New York City also had a reputation of carrying reliable news from

Mexico City. One of its assistant editors had formerly edited a Mexico City paper and retained contacts there. Declining revenue forced it to suspend publication in Fall, 1847, but it resumed publication in New Orleans in March, 1848 under the same editorial management.<sup>123</sup>

In addition to the New Orleans publications, the country's newspapers depended on two other major sources for news about the war — the Mexican and Cuban press. The New York Tribune estimated there were 50 papers published in Mexico at the start of the war.<sup>124</sup> Excerpts from Mexican newspapers were widely reprinted in American papers during the war. The New Orleans papers, living in the midst of a population familiar with Spanish, led the translation and reprinting of the Mexican items. The Picayune explained: "From the newspapers of that country, edited as they are with intelligence and force, we can best gather the dispositions of her people, and learn the specific designs of her military."<sup>125</sup> On occasion the news from the Mexican papers proved a disappointment to the Picayune. "In no paper...do we find any token of submission," the New Orleans paper complained. "Every paragraph breathes threats of vengeance."<sup>126</sup> The Picayune also noted, "If the Mexican people are a tithe as bellicose as the Mexican press, there is much to do before the pen of the diplomat is called in requisition."<sup>127</sup>

El Republicano of Mexico City had the best reputation with the American editors. The Picayune said it was "a paper of more weight" than any other. It added:

What we wish to impress upon all is the character of the paper...We have been reading it for many years and have ever found it — in all forms and under all names — the best index to the state of feeling in Mexico to be obtained. It embodies much more positively the national sentiment of Mexico than any American journal we can think of embodies public opinion with us.<sup>128</sup>

The Delta also praised El Republicano as "able" and was critical of the Mexican government for its "crackdown on press freedom" in Mexico City.<sup>129</sup> The latter situation was enforced by Santa Anna's government throughout most of the war. On one occasion El Republicano's editor criticized Santa Anna for appointing too many new officers and giving too many honors in view of the continuing defeats. "An American writer could hardly sum up more justly the events of the war," the Picayune said admiringly. It added, however, Santa Anna cracked down on the paper shortly after the article appeared, leaving Mexico City's papers "by no means so interesting or instructive."<sup>130</sup>

Some of the Mexico City editors attempted to avoid Santa Anna's restrictions by moving to other Mexican cities where the dictator's weak central government did not control conditions.<sup>131</sup> Santa Anna had his own good reasons, of course, for shutting down the Mexico City newspapers. On one hand he was fighting for his political life.<sup>132</sup> A report by the Picayune in July, 1847 indicated another motive for the censorship. "The censorship of the press existing in Mexico," the New Orleans paper complained, "prevents us from knowing what measures to defend the city will be taken."<sup>133</sup> (Censorship is discussed in Chapter 22).

Cuba also was an important source of Mexican news through-



out the war. There were nine daily newspapers on the island at the time, including four in Havana.<sup>134</sup> The island served as an important intermediary stop for the steamers of Spain and England as they traveled between Mexico and Europe. From Havana, Mexican newspapers, mail and cargo were forwarded to the principal American ports of New Orleans, Charleston and New York.<sup>135</sup> Newspapers such as the Picayune and Delta, the Charleston Courier and the New York Sun and Herald maintained correspondents at Havana throughout the war period to facilitate the forwarding of news.

## NOTES

1. New Orleans Delta, December 3, 1847. The latter reference was to Zachery Taylor's presidential prospects.
2. Thomas Ewing Dabney, One Hundred Great Years; The Story of the Times-Picayune from Its Founding to 1940 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1944), pp. 4-5.
3. Fayette Copeland, Kendall of the Picayune, (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1943), p. 143. The Copeland and Dabney studies provide excellent information on the Picayune and Mexican War period.
4. Ibid., p. 2.
5. Hudson, op. cit., p. 491.
6. Ibid., p. 492; Also author's research.
7. Milton Rickels, Thomas Bangs Thorpe, Humorist of the Old Southwest, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1962), pp. 109-10.
8. Charleston Courier, June 10, 1847.
9. Philadelphia North American, July 17, 1847.
10. Quoted in New Orleans Crescent, April 24, 1848.
11. Washington Union, April 1, 1847.
12. Quoted in New Orleans Delta, November 26, 1847.
13. Dabney, op. cit., p. 15.
14. Ibid., pp. 65-68; Copeland, op. cit., Chaps. 11-12.
15. Dabney, op. cit., pp. 60-1.
16. Ibid.
17. New Orleans Picayune, May 1, 1846.
18. New York Sun, January 17, February 4, 1848.
19. Charleston Courier, January 21, 1847.
20. Ibid., May 15, 1847.
21. Copeland, op. cit., Chaps. 1-3.

22. George Wilkins Kendall, Letters from a Texas Sheep Ranch. Edited by James Harry Brown. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1959), p. 123.
23. Copeland, op. cit., pp. 116, 289.
24. New Orleans Delta, September 22, 1847; Copeland, op. cit., Chaps. 13-18.
25. New Orleans Picayune, August 23, 1845.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid., July 25, 1846.
28. Ibid.
29. See Denis Corcoran, Pickings from the Picayune, (Philadelphia: Carey and Hart, 1846).
30. New Orleans Picayune, September 28, 1845.
31. New Orleans Delta, October 12, 1845.
32. See Ibid., December 24, 1846, for example.
33. Ibid., November 2, 1847.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid., May 9, 1848.
37. Ibid., September 29, October 13, 1846.
38. Ibid., January 5, 1847.
39. Ibid., January 5, 1848. The paper ran two-page news and advertising supplements on eight dates during the first three weeks it had the press.
40. Ibid., January 19, 1848.
41. Ibid., December 13, 1845.
42. Ibid., March 21, 1848.
43. Ibid., November 10, 1847.

44. Ibid., March 31, 1848. The arrangement grew out of the friendship between the Delta's correspondent James L. Freaner and peace negotiator Nicholas P. Trist.
45. Ibid., January 7, 1846.
46. Ibid., May 3, 1846. Also see July 2, 1846.
47. Ibid., May 23, 1846.
48. Ibid., December 9, 1846.
49. Ibid., December 6, 1846. Also see December 12, 1846.
50. Ibid., March 27, 1846.
51. Ibid., October 14, 1845. Also see March 27, 1846; July 28, 1847; February 9, 1848.
52. Ibid., May 10, 1846.
53. Ibid., June 13, 16, 1846.
54. Ibid., June 25, December 6, 1846.
55. Ibid., January 6, 1847.
56. Ibid., January 26, 1847.
57. Ibid., January 14, 1847.
58. Ibid., January 17, 1847.
59. Ibid., December 30, 1847.
60. Ibid., June 28, 1848. The editorial also showed how the Delta, like a number of other Americans, misjudged the latent problems existing for the country in the territory added by the war. Rather than strengthening the Union, the territory added by the Mexican War planted the seeds for the Civil War.
61. New Orleans Crescent, March 5, 1848.
62. Ibid. The Crescent sold for 5 cents a copy, 15 cents on a weekly subscription.
63. Ibid., March 9, 1848.
64. Ibid.
65. Ibid., March 20, 1848.

66. Ibid., May 31, 1848.
67. Ibid., May 4,8, 1848.
68. Prospectus printed in New Orleans Delta, October 13, 1845.
69. Rickels, op. cit., Chap. 1.
70. New Orleans Delta, October 13, 1845.
71. Rickels, op. cit., p. 109.
72. New Orleans Picayune, April 25, 1848.
73. Rickels, op. cit., Chaps. 4,5,10.
74. New Orleans Delta, April 1,3, 1846.
75. Rickels, op. cit., p. 117.
76. One measure of this is the wide use of the Tropic's war news by other papers. For examples see Baltimore Sun, May 13,14; June 8,26; July 1,14,18; August 25; October 10,19,22,24,30; November 23; December 7,23, all 1846. Also Washington Union, May 6,23, 1846; St. Louis Reveille, July 10; October 22, 1846.
77. For examples see New Orleans Delta, October 2,9; December 22, 1846; New Orleans Picayune, October 14, 1846.
78. See examples in Baltimore Sun, June 8, 1846; Philadelphia North American, October 28, 1846; Washington Union, May 23, 1846.
79. Rickels, op. cit., p. 127.
80. New Orleans Delta, September 18, 1846.
81. Ibid., May 5, 1847.
82. Ibid., May 29, June 9, 1846.
83. New Orleans Picayune, October 21, 1847.
84. Rickels, op. cit., p. 141.
85. New Orleans Picayune, December 18, 1847.
86. New Orleans Delta, February 20, 1848.
87. Ibid., November 1,3, 1846.
88. Ibid., November 10, 1846.

89. Ibid., November 26, 1846.
90. New Orleans Picayune, November 10, 1846.
91. Ibid.
92. New Orleans Crescent, April 24, 1848. Also see New Orleans Delta, February 9, 15, 1848.
93. Ibid., January 13, 1846. Also see Delta, June 16, September 3, 1846, and January 5, 1847.
94. Ibid., June 16, 1846.
95. For examples of other papers using La Patria's Mexico news see Delta June 3, July 12, November 27, 1846; January 22, February 25, April 25, May 5, June 10, 1847; New Orleans Picayune, July 3, 1847; St. Louis Reveille, October 13, 1846.
96. See New Orleans Delta, July 12, 1846.
97. Quoted in Ibid., April 10, 1847.
98. See New Orleans Picayune August 24, 1847, for example.
99. See examples in New Orleans Delta, March 7, May 15, 1847.
100. Ibid., October 24, 1846.
101. Ibid., September 16, 1847.
102. Washington Union, September 23, 1847.
103. Charleston Courier, July 10, 1847.
104. Philadelphia North American, October 13, 1847.
105. New Orleans Delta, December 8, 1846.
106. New Orleans Picayune, May 22, 1847.
107. Ibid., Treatment of American prisoners in Mexico was a special issue with the Picayune because its editor George Wilkins Kendall had once been a prisoner in a Mexico City jail. (See Chapter 5).
108. Ibid., May 27, 1847.
109. Ibid., June 4, 1847.
110. Ibid., June 8, 1847.

111. New Orleans La Patria, December 31, 1846, quoted in New Orleans Delta, January 26, 1847.
112. Ibid.
113. Quoted by New Orleans Delta, January 26, 1847.
114. Quaife, ed., Polk Diary, op. cit., II: 327-8.
115. New Orleans Delta, January 26, 1847.
116. Charleston Courier, January 26, 1847.
117. Ibid.
118. New Orleans La Patria, January 24, 1847, quoted in New Orleans Delta, January 27, 1847.
119. Quoted in New Orleans Delta, April 10, 1847.
120. Ibid.
121. Ibid., May 23, 1847.
122. For examples of it cited as a news source see New Orleans Delta, February 1, 3, April 21, June 19, 1846; Washington Union, April 13, May 11, 1846; Baltimore Sun, May 26, 1847; Boston Transcript, April 26, 1847.
123. New Orleans Picayune, March 23, 1848.
124. Quoted in Ibid., June 3, 1846.
125. Ibid., October 18, 1846.
126. Ibid., November 8, 1846.
127. Ibid., January 3, 1846.
128. Ibid., March 21, 1847.
129. New Orleans Delta, May 26, 1847.
130. New Orleans Picayune, July 15, 1847.
131. Ibid., August 12, 1847.
132. Smith, op. cit., Chap. 21.
133. New Orleans Picayune, July 8, 1847.

134. New Orleans Delta, April 2, 1846.

135. For examples of newspaper deliveries from Havana see New Orleans Delta November 17, 1846, January 20, 1847.



## CHAPTER 5

### OPENING BATTLES: VOLUNTEER

#### LETTER WRITERS

The sequence of events leading up to the start of the Mexican War remains among the more controversial aspects of the conflict. The annexation of Texas by the United States in mid-1845 greatly aggravated relations with Mexico, which had never recognized the independence of Texas despite the military setback it suffered at the hands of the Texans in 1836. In addition to this dispute, the United States was pressing claims against Mexico for injuries and property damage suffered by American citizens at the hands of the Mexicans.

In an effort to settle these claims, the U.S. government sent John Slidell as a special minister empowered to negotiate the claims and to attempt to purchase New Mexico and California from the Mexican government. At that time these areas were under the ineffectual control of the central Mexican government. Because the Mexican government was quite weak, it was unable to receive Slidell without running the risk of falling. It forced the American representative to wait several months and then

finally decided it could not receive him. The refusal was considered a diplomatic setback by the American government.<sup>1</sup>

President Polk had anticipated that Texas would vote to join the United States. He had moved a small army under General Zachary Taylor, a relatively unknown officer whose primary experience had been in frontier areas, to western Louisiana near the Texas border. As soon as the results of the Texas annexation vote were known in July, 1845, Taylor moved his force to Corpus Christi, Texas, on the Gulf of Mexico. When it became clear to Polk the Slidell mission had failed, he ordered Taylor south to the Rio Grande, which was the southern border claimed by the Texans, a claim the Mexicans disputed.<sup>2</sup>

In March, 1846 Taylor's army broke camp for the march south. The Corpus Christi Gazette reported: "The Army of Occupation has left for the Rio Grande....The tents are nearly all pulled down and removed with the troops, except now and then one occupied by the women, who will join the army via Point Isabel...."<sup>3</sup> The army, which seldom exceeded 10,000 men, at least half of whom were untrained volunteers, formed one of the most interesting stories of the war. It invariably fought larger forces holding better ground, and invariably showed courage, intelligence and initiative. In proportion to its numbers, one military historian has described it as "about the 'fightingest' crowd we have ever assembled, and its excessive pugnacity, when not united into common action against the enemy, vented itself in internecine quarrels."<sup>4</sup> When not fighting with the Mexicans, the

squabbles within the army took the form of disputes between the President and the two top generals — Taylor and Scott; disputes among many of the leading officers; northerners against southerners; regulars against volunteers; and volunteers with volunteers.<sup>5</sup>

The movement of Taylor's army to the Rio Grande greatly aroused the Mexicans, who considered both the annexation of Texas and the arrival of the American troops as illegal. The Mexicans moved additional troops to the south bank of the Rio Grande and on April 25, 1846, 1,500 of them crossed the river and fought a battle with a small detachment of American troops.<sup>6</sup> Taylor's report of the attack reached Polk in Washington on Saturday, May 9, 1846, and the following Monday Polk sent a declaration of war message to Congress, which immediately accepted it.<sup>7</sup>

Meanwhile, at the disputed border, the larger Mexican army attempted to win a quick victory. It crossed the Rio Grande in force, hoping to rout Taylor's army of about 4,000. But on May 8, at Palo Alto, Texas, and the following day at nearby Reseca de la Palma, the Mexicans were badly defeated and forced back across the river.<sup>8</sup> Taylor followed them, but slowly, being handicapped by a shortage of boats, wagons and other supplies.

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There were no newspaper correspondents with the army when it fought the opening battles of the war — but there was no shortage of correspondence to the newspapers about the battles. Letters from participants and observers started to reach the

papers, particularly the New Orleans papers, in such large numbers that the Picayune eventually was moved to comment, "The fact is you might just as well stop the rations of the regulars as bridle the tongue or pen of the volunteers."<sup>9</sup> Along the same lines, the National Intelligencer observed, "The complaints, sufferings and achievements of (the) army have been given to the public by almost as many pens as there are bayonets among its numbers...."<sup>10</sup>

From these initial observations of the men on the battlefield, most of them members of the army, grew the reporting of the war. As the conflict continued over the next two years the various writers fell into three general classifications: letter writers, occasional correspondents and, finally, special correspondents. In the definition of the day, a letter writer most often was a member of the army who wrote letters to newspapers to promote or detract from the accomplishments of various officers or military units. They were not members of the press, but since their letters often contained much original news they were widely used.

The term "occasional correspondent" was also widely used, and it overlapped at times with the term "special correspondent." The work of the occasional correspondents was more legitimate than that of the letter writers. Many of the occasional correspondents were former members of the press, often printers or editors of small papers who had volunteered to become members of the army when the war got under way. Stationed at scattered

posts and cities over the vast area of Mexico occupied by the American army, they helped pass their idle time by sending mostly unsolicited letters to the American press with news and speculations about the war. Using colorful pseudonyms such as "Hombre," "Lancer," "Corporal," "Rinconda," "Indicator," "American Reporter," "The Major," "Marinus" and "White Hat," their letters formed a large portion of the war's first-hand reporting. The third category, special correspondents, were newspapermen sent specifically to Mexico to cover the activities and battles of the war. (This latter category is discussed in detail in Chapter 6).

The art of letter writing was a well established practice in American journalism at the start of the Mexican War. Many of the country's leading newspapers regularly received such letters from Washington and the country's leading commercial cities.<sup>11</sup> The practice was not without its detractors. The New Orleans Delta promised it would not copy items from "those unreliable, gossiping eavesdroppers the Washington letter writers...not one word said by those truthless scribblers can be relied on — not a word."<sup>12</sup> A surprising amount of war information was supplied by the Washington letter writers, however. For example, they reported Taylor would march his army south to the Rio Grande months before he actually did.<sup>13</sup> The Philadelphia North American and the New York Herald had reports the government planned an assault on Vera Cruz seven months before it began.<sup>14</sup> The Herald's story started, "We learn from high authority in Washington, not the President..." It even gave the names of 20 U.S. Navy captains

who were being assembled to plan the assault.<sup>15</sup> Another Herald article in October, 1846 correctly predicted the government's war plan would involve taking the cities of Tampico and Saltillo, and then holding them while an encircling thrust was made at Vera Cruz.<sup>16</sup>

When the Washington correspondent of the New York Journal of Commerce correctly predicted the timing of the assault on Tampico, the New Orleans Picayune said it considered him "well informed" and the "next best source" to editor Thomas Ritchie of the Washington Union on government plans.<sup>17</sup> In Fall, 1846, after the Charleston Courier's Washington correspondent predicted (correctly) the Tampico attack, the New Orleans Delta commented somewhat admiringly:

There is not a government in the world that takes less pains to conceal its plans and purposes of war than our own....by some clairvoyant principle possessed by Washington letter-writers (plans are announced) almost as soon as known.... They do not always tell the truth, yet, in most cases certain members of the corps are generally right as to facts.<sup>18</sup>

This often was the case for the letter writers from the army, as well. Many of the writers had incomplete or incorrect information, but, as the newspapers discovered, even negative reports could have value to their readers. An editorial in the Baltimore Sun defended the use of the letters from the camps with this argument: "At the present time, when the greatest interest prevails with regard to (our military)...., an intelligent correspondent at any place accessible for information is a valuable adjunct to the press."<sup>19</sup> The Washington Union also explained

why the press was making extensive use of the letters: "In the absence of the official dispatches we continue to lay before our readers the private letters from the troops which are pouring into newspaper offices."<sup>20</sup> The Union added:

We only regret that the correspondents from the camps, or their publishers in the cities, do not sometimes keep back reflections which are calculated to wound the feelings of some, and produce a feud with others. There are laurels enough for all to share.<sup>21</sup>

One letter to the Union was particularly critical of the letters from volunteers, the writer stating he was "sorry to find a new branch added to the army — soldiers who cater for the press."<sup>22</sup> The Washington correspondent of the Charleston Courier observed, "There are some corps in the army which appear to be favored by the exertions of trumpeters in their own ranks connected with editors at home."<sup>23</sup> The uneven quality of the letters from the army caused the same writer to complain, "The corps of correspondents attached to the army does not seem to be very well organized." The writer suggested his own unique plan for organizing the reporting:

The demands of public curiosity would justify the issue of a daily bulletin, under the direction of a judicious editor, at headquarters, which would contain a full account of every proceeding, as furnished by a very full corps of reporters. The press might be worked while the artillery were playing or the cavalry charging, and as soon as the action were over, a full report of it... (might) already be in print, and ready for the expresses....<sup>24</sup>

There was another side to the letter writing: the problem of the "planted" letter, a document which actually originated

in the United States and was meant to hurt or promote the political potential of prominent officers. An editorial in the Philadelphia North American noted many of the letters from Mexico "are marked by a high order of talent, and many others, as might be expected, are wholly unsuited for the public eye."<sup>25</sup> The paper asked a key question: "But of the vast number of letters which are published purporting to have been written in Mexico, and indulging in unwarranted remarks upon officers there or on parties at home, how many are genuine?" Most Mexican letters which included political attacks were "spurious," the paper charged, adding: "We suspect that the domestic manufacture of Mexican letters is becoming an extensive branch of industry." The press itself held the responsibility for ending the practice, the North American contended. "No respectable journal will give currency to a calumny upon anonymous authority...It is a base mode of attack, cowardly and contemptible...."<sup>26</sup>

As the war continued, attacks against officers mounted, leaving the non-political press in a quandary as how to handle the charges. When a letter attacking General Stephen W. Kearny appeared in the press, the New Orleans Picayune explained, "We are compelled to give it as part of the history of the times." The paper added, "But...we wish the letter had not been written."<sup>27</sup> On another occasion, after it ran a letter from Zachary Taylor to a friend in New Orleans telling details of the battle of Buena Vista, the Picayune stated, "The letter was not intended for the press, but we make no apology for publishing



such portions of it which are of public concern."<sup>28</sup> Stating the complaints of many, a letter to the Washington Union from an unnamed army officer said:

I agree, as do most of the officers of the army, with you, at disgust at that wretched... legion of correspondents to the numerous papers in the different parts of the states....many of (the letters) are exaggerated or highly colored, if not altogether fabulous, and the writers and scenes fictitious and imaginery. Half of the stories told...are purely imagination....

The writer concluded: "This world is sadly given to humbug and lying! But what can you expect when there is any number of penny-a-liners belonging to different papers out here, in quest of matter and news."<sup>29</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

The work of the occasional correspondents fell into an entirely different category than that of the letter writers. For the most part, it was much more legitimate. The occasional correspondents grew from a phenomenon special to the Mexican War — a large number of American printers, reporters and editors enlisted to serve in the war. So many joined that at one point the New Orleans Picayune reported "it is computed that over 500 printers have enlisted for the Mexican war...."<sup>30</sup> The Philadelphia Public Ledger noted, "There is no profession or trade which, in proportion to its numbers, has sent so many men to war as the (press)."<sup>31</sup> Soon after the opening battles a correspondent of the Picayune wrote, "There are too many (writers) in the field. General [Persifor] Smith's command might in truth be called the 'press gang,' for the greater part are...printers.

They won't fight any the worse for that, however."<sup>33</sup> A popular anecdote regarding "the great numerical force of the printers in the army" was told by the St. Louis Reveille. General Scott, according to the tale, needed some military orders printed by a local newspaper, but was told "due to a shortage of hands it couldn't be done." The next morning at parade Scott is supposed to have ordered all printers to take three steps forward, only to find several hundred men obeying the command.<sup>34</sup>

Although the rush of newsmen to join the army led to a great pool of potential correspondents for the press, it also created problems for it. In New Orleans the printers' rush to volunteer almost brought the city's papers to a standstill. The New Orleans Delta reported "nearly 50" of the city's 200 printers "have already dropped the composing stick." So great was their enthusiasm, the paper said, "that the question is not 'Who will go?' but 'Who will remain?'."<sup>35</sup> At Mobile the Daily Register felt a similar pinch as its printers left to join an Alabama volunteer unit.<sup>36</sup> So many printers volunteered in Philadelphia, the Philadelphia Keystone reported, that Adam Ramage, a city printer and inventor of the Ramage press, had offered their volunteer unit a press to take to Mexico to issue "bulletins from the seat of war announcing their achievements."<sup>37</sup>

The New Orleans Jeffersonian went so far as to print an item requesting printers from other states to move to New Orleans to take up the slack. James Risk, president of the New Orleans Typographers Association, quickly countered the suggestion,

however, pointing out:

We would inform the printers throughout the United States that notwithstanding a large number of our fellow craftsmen have promptly responded to the call of their country...there is still a sufficient number to do the work during the summer months.<sup>38</sup>

He pointed out the six-month volunteer enlistments of the printers would be over in time for them to return to the city for the next business season. "Certainly every feeling of patriotism and gratitude will dictate to those who may have the bestowal of employment that they should give the preference to the brave defenders of their country," Risk stated.<sup>39</sup>

Henry A. McGlenen, a printer for the Boston Daily Times, was reported to be one of the first people to volunteer for a Massachusetts Regiment organized in December, 1846. As a parting gift his fellow "typos" gave him a bowie knife, powder flask, powder, mould, balls and a pair of pistols with his name inscribed on them.<sup>40</sup> The same Massachusetts unit was reported to have two editors and six printers in its ranks.<sup>41</sup> When the regiment left for Mexico the printer volunteers were given a party by the city printers association and presented with "presents, songs, toasts and speeches."<sup>42</sup> It was reported the same unit had taken along "all the materials for printing a newspaper, which (it) will issue semi-occasionally on the voyage...and wherever they camp long enough to print it."<sup>43</sup>

The New Orleans papers also were hurt by the loss of editorial staff. The Delta lost its assistant editor and a reporter. So short-handed was the paper that its editor wrote, "We

are in a predicament — in a plight — in a quandary — in a fix."<sup>44</sup> At Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, five editors reportedly joined the volunteers as "soldiers for the war:" I.R. Diller of the Reporter; J.J.C. Cantine, Argus; C. McCurdy, Intelligencer; U.J. Jones, Reformer; and Theodore Fenn, Telegraph.<sup>45</sup> The city newsmen and printers were not the only ones joining the rush to volunteer. A number of community editors signed up too. In Louisiana, for example, at least four country editors answered the first call for help: H.S. McFarland of the Plaquemine Planter's Gazette, Dr. W.A. Norris of the Bayou Sara Ledger, editor Green of the Felician Whig and G.W. Reese of the Clinton Floridian.<sup>46</sup> C.M. Haile, a correspondent of the Picayune, traveling up the Rio Grande on a steamboat, was surprised to find the boat's captain was a former editor of the Vicksburg (Mississippi) Sentinel. "You find ex-editors and printers in departments of the service here, from officers of rank down to the 'bone and sinew' who carry the musket," Haile wrote, "and I have not yet had the misfortune to meet a black sheep among them."<sup>47</sup>

Typical of the many reports which came from the newsmen turned soldiers was one by the former editor of the Columbus (Georgia) Times, who had joined the Georgia Volunteers. In a letter to his former paper he gave a variety of impressions about the camps and the Mexican countryside. "I immediately remember George Wilkins Kendall's...description of its exceeding scantiness and adaptation to a hot climate," he wrote. It was a standing joke in the regiment, he said, to wonder how things were

back "in America," although it was just across the river from the camp. When visiting in town he found it necessary to walk in the middle of the street to "avoid the harpies." He also presented an anecdote about meeting Zachary Taylor:

We approached one of the shabbiest (tents) we saw, and were told that it was General Taylor's. The old gentleman was sitting outside under a scrub of a tree on a block bench.... He received us politely but without the least ceremony or fuss, and fell straight to talking... He seemed to have no secrets — talked of his plans and prospects; said we should all go ahead very soon...he wanted to end the war speedily...

He then gave a description of Taylor which was typical of the correspondents' letters, and which eventually helped Taylor's national image immeasurably:

General Taylor is as he has been described, a plain, a very plain looking man. He looks like an old planter who has never seen a uniform, much less had one on. I like the old general's manners and appearance, although I must confess the latter scattered all my anticipations of a halo of chivalric glory to be discovered in the atmosphere surrounding a military hero's head.<sup>48</sup>

Many of the volunteer-correspondents wrote under difficult conditions. One for the New Orleans Delta apologized for having to write his letters with pencil: "You will find (it) difficult to read."<sup>49</sup> Another Delta correspondent reported: "I write in camp on a chair, or bed, on anything or with anything I can find....I'm (rushed) so if you condense or shape it so as to make it publishable, it will do me great pleasure..."<sup>50</sup> A volunteer who wrote regularly to the Baltimore Sun said, "There are no stationery stores in this part of the world...so I have

paid our sutler a dime a sheet for this..."<sup>51</sup> A Delta correspondent, who used the penname "Hombre" and wrote from an army storage depot at the mouth of the Rio Grande throughout the war, noted on one occasion:

Some of the good folks, after reading Hombre's last letter, grumbled that it was not 'spicy and rich!' Now I would like to know how the deuce one is to get up anything spicy and rich without the necessary material.<sup>52</sup>

The lack of substantial news to report was one of the main weaknesses of the "occasional correspondent" system. After the front-line units moved to other areas, the writers from the camps and occupied towns often fell back on rumors and exaggerated anecdotes to fill their letters. A correspondent of the Picayune, after reading an exaggerated item about a captain of the Texas Rangers, observed:

I greatly fear our Mexican friends will not believe us at all after a while, even if we should overrun all Mexico....These ridiculous puffs do no good and make honest men doubt even the truth when it is told.<sup>53</sup>

A correspondent for the Delta wrote: "Every vague rumor (is) made the subject of a long letter to one of your public journals. Could these letter writers look beyond their own personal gratifications, or....their private interests, it would seem that humanity would dictate to them at least to withhold their information until the truth is ascertained."<sup>54</sup> During a visit to the army camps near Matamoros, the Picayune's Haile observed, "Rumor is always busy enough, spreading ridiculous tales from one encampment to another, and the wags and 'green'uns,' and literary

aspirants, have no doubt kept the newspapers abundantly supplied with this species of 'important news.'"<sup>55</sup>

After looking at the initial avalanche of letters and stories from the army camps Niles' National Register, the Baltimore weekly magazine which reprinted news from many of the nation's newspapers, commented in a tone of exasperation, "We have found it no trifle of a task to sift the...facts from such a heterogeneous mass of exaggeration and preposterous stories as filled the daily newspapers and 'EXTRAS,'..." Many of the stories and resulting extra editions, the Register continued, were "made up for speculation and utterly regardless of anything but to make a market for credulity." The public should protest "such impositions," the Register said, and the practice would stop.<sup>56</sup>

The work of the letter writers and the occasional correspondents did not stop, however, and their reports were a factor in the public understanding of the conflict throughout the two-year period. The letter writers, many with political motives, continued to support or attack various leading officers, using the political press as their primary channel for publication. A number of these letters, though, because they contained some news or provided some previously unreported understanding of the war's events, found their way into the non-political press. On several occasions the President, the War Department and the commanding generals attempted to halt the practice (see Chapter 19 for further discussion), but the letters continued to appear right to

the end of the war.

The large body of work produced by the occasional correspondents fell into a different category. Many of these writers had previous newspaper connections, and their reports, although including rumor and often exaggeration, had considerably more news value. Much of this work grew out of an interesting development regarding the war — the fact many of the volunteers came from the ranks of the nation's newsmen, particularly printers. The combination of their previous newspaper experience and the idle time they had after they reached the army camps resulted in a considerable amount of news reporting, particularly to the urban press. Much of this correspondence was, in turn, reprinted by other papers, resulting in a substantial contribution to what the American public knew about the war's developments.



## NOTES

1. For a concise discussion of this pre-war period see Seymour V. Connor and Odie B. Faulk, North America Divided; The Mexican War 1846-1848, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971.) Chap. 1
2. Ibid.
3. Corpus Christi Gazette, March 12, 1846, quoted in New Orleans Delta, March 21, 1846.
4. Edward S. Wallace, "The United States Army in Mexico City," Military Affairs, XIII (Fall 1949) 3: 158-66.
5. Ibid.
6. Smith, op. cit., I: 156-80.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. New Orleans Picayune, January 1, 1848.
10. Quoted in Niles' National Register, October 10, 1846, p. 89.
11. See F.B. Marbut, News from the Capital; The Story of Washington Reporting (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1971).
12. New Orleans Delta, November 7, 1845.
13. Ibid., December 31, 1845.
14. Ibid., July 26, 1846.
15. New York Herald, July 17, 1846, quoted in Delta, July 26, 1846.
16. Quoted in New Orleans Delta, October 28, 1846.
17. New Orleans Picayune, October 27, November 1, 1846.
18. New Orleans Delta, February 1, 1847.
19. Baltimore Sun, September 24, 1846.
20. Washington Union, November 2, 1846.
21. Ibid.

22. Quoted in Charleston Courier, October 27, 1846.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Philadelphia North American, January 16, 1847.
26. Ibid.
27. New Orleans Picayune, November 16, 1847.
28. Ibid., April 14, 1847.
29. Washington Union, September 14, 1846.
30. New Orleans Picayune, January 20, 1847.
31. Philadelphia Public Ledger quoted in Ibid., December 15, 1846.
32. New Orleans Delta, January 2, 1847.
33. New Orleans Picayune, July 9, 1846.
34. St. Louis Reveille, April 9, 1847.
35. New Orleans Delta, May 5, 1846.
36. Quoted in New Orleans Picayune, May 9, 1846.
37. New Orleans Delta, May 9, 1846.
38. New Orleans Delta, May 8, 1846.
39. Ibid.
40. New Orleans Picayune, January 23, 1847.
41. Ibid., January 5, 1847.
42. Ibid., February 5, 1847.
43. Charleston Courier, January 11, 1847.
44. New Orleans Delta, May 13, 1846.
45. Quoted in the New Orleans Picayune, July 7, 1846.
46. New Orleans Delta, May 8, 14, September 17, 1846.
47. New Orleans Picayune, February 3, 1847.

48. Quoted in Washington Union, August 25, 1846.
49. New Orleans Delta, May 23, 1846.
50. Ibid., May 29, 1846.
51. Baltimore Sun, October 30, 1846.
52. New Orleans Delta, January 26, 1848.
53. New Orleans Picayune, August 9, 1846.
54. New Orleans Delta, June 5, 1846.
55. New Orleans Picayune, June 14, 1846.
56. Niles' National Register, May 23, 1846, p. 179.

## CHAPTER 6

### THE FIRST WAR CORRESPONDENTS

After defeating the Mexicans in the battles of May 8-9 on the Texas side of the Rio Grande, Taylor crossed over and took the key Mexican town of Matamoros near the mouth of the river. It was soon apparent, however, that he would not be able to advance into Mexico. He had insufficient supplies, ammunition and wagons to move his forces. The rainy season began in a short time, and as a result Taylor was forced to spend the summer at Matamoros waiting for the necessary equipment and men before he could advance. Several other towns along the river, Reynoso, Camargo and Mier also were occupied by the Americans, but it was September before the fighting was renewed.<sup>1</sup>

It was not readily apparent to the press in the States that a lull in the fighting had set in. The demand for news was still great, and in order to satisfy it the New Orleans papers began sending fulltime correspondents to the various army camps to supplement the uneven coverage being supplied by the "occasional correspondents." Before long a group of "special correspondents" — in effect the country's first war correspondents — were writing to the papers on a regular basis.

An important correspondent during the opening months of

the war was Thomas Bangs Thorpe, New Orleans newspaper editor and an established writer and artist.<sup>2</sup> His writing had made him "well known to the 'press gang' on both sides of the Atlantic," William Trotter Porter, editor of the Spirit of the Times, observed in 1845.<sup>3</sup> Thorpe often was referred to in the press as "Tom Owen, the Bee Hunter," after the title of one of his popular short stories. Thorpe was born and raised in the Northeast and attended Wesleyan University in Connecticut before moving to Louisiana in the late 1830s and starting his popular sketches of outdoor life in the Southwest. (Louisiana and Arkansas were considered part of the Southwest at the time.) Thorpe, who was 31 when the war broke out, is described as having been "a short, thick-set young man, with a big nose and saturnine face." He had been active in Louisiana politics for several years before the war, serving as co-editor of the pro-Whig Concordia Intelligencer at Vidalia, Louisiana, across the river from Natchez, Mississippi. The paper had a wide reputation throughout the South as a quality weekly paper.<sup>4</sup>

Thorpe moved to New Orleans in November, 1845 as editor of the new Commercial Times. In April, 1846 he became editor of the older, pro-Whig New Orleans Tropic.<sup>5</sup> He left the Tropic in September, 1846 and moved to Baton Rouge, where he started the Louisiana Conservator in November. The paper was not successful, and in June, 1847 Thorpe returned to New Orleans to become editor of a new daily, the pro-Taylor National.<sup>6</sup>

It was while serving as editor of the Tropic in late

Spring, 1846 that Thorpe played his most active role in coverage of the war. From the start of the fight, Thorpe's biographer has noted, the young Whig editor "shared the common attitude that the war was a stirring and adventurous affair."<sup>7</sup> In mid-May, after the opening battles, Thorpe was selected by a group of Louisiana politicians to travel to Taylor's camp and present the general with a military sash which had once belonged to General Edward Braddock.<sup>8</sup> Taking a boat from New Orleans, Thorpe arrived at Matamoros in the last week of May.<sup>9</sup> He was happy to report he was received "with distinguished kindness by the officers of the army wherever I have met them."<sup>10</sup> Thorpe repaid some of the kindness in his letters back to the Tropic. They contained glowing descriptions of a number of the high ranking officers, such as this one of Colonel (later general) David Twiggs:

The brave Colonel is before me; he is grey-haired, remarkably stout, and a perfect military looking man. His face is almost covered with tremendous whiskers, joined together by a moustache that looks exceedingly fierce and very like old Blucher.<sup>11</sup>

Thorpe's power of description could carry over to other people, as well, such as a group of Mexicans who were being questioned by Twiggs in his tent.

They are dressed in large palmetto hats covered with glazed cloth, and ornamented by bands of the most tremendous size, and silver 'fixins' on the side that resemble the knob of an old-fashioned bureau. Their waists are encircled with gay belts, and their pantaloons tanned deer skins, and open on the side seam from the hip down, exposing their white linen drawers; they are very Mexican and very picturesque.<sup>12</sup>

Like many of the other writers on the scene, Thorpe had a low opinion of the Mexicans. His articles referred to them in terms of cowardice, brutality and inferiority. In recounting some anecdotes from the battles of May 8-9 in which the bodies of dead Americans were reportedly mutilated and robbed, Thorpe said, "For the cause of humanity we relate that the gallant (American officer) was dead when these indignities were offered to his remains." He concluded that the Mexican army officers "deserve the execration of every civilised nation and the contempt of every Christian people...." Reinforcing one of the key precepts of Manifest Destiny — that the American system was best — Thorpe wrote, "It is time these Mexicans were better informed in the most simple precepts of civilization."<sup>13</sup>

Although he did not witness any fighting, and was with the army for less than six weeks, Thorpe played a role in the war's coverage off and on for approximately 18 months, partly as a New Orleans editor and partly as the author of two books about the war. He played a particularly important part in the promotion of the growing hero image of Taylor, which eventually helped boost the relatively obscure frontier general to the White House in 1848. Thorpe was among the first to suggest publicly that Taylor might become president. In the Tropic of June 25, 1846, after another New Orleans paper had criticized Taylor's generalship in the battles of May 8-9, Thorpe stated:

...any attempt to persecute Genl. Taylor or lessen his high standing before the people of the United States, will most certainly make him president of the United States. Let 'Old Rough

and Ready' alone, he is a hero, and he cannot be slandered out of his position by all the presses in the world.<sup>14</sup>

As a Louisiana Whig, Thorpe had good access to Taylor and the officers of his staff. During the short time he spent in the army camps on Point Isabel and on the Rio Grande, Thorpe collected a number of interviews and anecdotes regarding Taylor, the army and the two opening battles. Many of these found their way into the pages of the Tropic, and from there to the papers on the Eastern seaboard.<sup>15</sup>

Thorpe started to work on a book about the army soon after his return from the camps. By September, 1846 Our Army on the Rio Grande was on sale in New Orleans. Thorpe's publishers, Carey and Hart of Philadelphia, printed another of his books, Our Army at Monterey, (sic) the following year. Neither publication, however, was a commercial success. Thorpe's collection of anecdotes and interviews, plus some sketches he had made in the camps and at Matamoros, formed the bulk of both volumes. The books showed, according to one analysis, "signs of haste in composition both in language and structure, but the narrative moves easily and is lively and colorful."<sup>16</sup> In the case of the second publication, dealing with Taylor's victory at Monterrey, Thorpe did not even go to the Mexican city but relied instead on interviews with returning participants, plus his previous material.

Although the books were not a success, Taylor apparently liked Thorpe's work and support of his political hopes well enough to have him write a third book, The Taylor Anecdote Book.



This publication, filled with biographical and anecdotal material about Taylor, was published in Summer, 1848 by D. Appleton and Company of New York as part of the Taylor presidential campaign. Although no longer connected with a newspaper, Thorpe also contributed to Taylor's campaign by delivering stump speeches and corresponding to newspapers about Taylor's activities in Louisiana.<sup>17</sup> Altogether, Thorpe's contribution to the war's coverage, while important to Taylor's candidacy, was brief and generally unimportant. "He had done his work as a journalist," his biographer noted, "seeking to capitalize on the excitement over the war."<sup>18</sup> His version of events was often romantic, emotional and stereotyped.

Another of the early fulltime correspondents on the scene was the Picayune's Christopher Mason Haile (at that time usually referred to as C.M. Haile; his signed correspondence carried only the capital letter H.). Haile has remained generally unrecognized, but his reporting and writing were among the most extensive of the war. He was born in Warren, Rhode Island, and was one of the state's appointees to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point in 1836 (Class of 1840).<sup>19</sup> An obituary in the Picayune at the time of his death in 1849 stated he graduated from West Point "with distinction," but the history of the academy indicates he left there before graduating and settled in Louisiana.<sup>20</sup>

Among his classmates at West Point were William Tecumseh Sherman; George Henry Thomas, the Civil War's "Rock of Chickamauga"; his future brother-in-law, Paul Octave Hebert, governor

of Louisiana 1853-56, a colonel in the Mexican War and a brigadier general in the Confederate States Army; Richard Stoddard Ewell, Confederate Lieutenant general; and Bushrod Rust Johnson, a Confederate major general. There is no clue why Haile left the academy, but it apparently was not an unusual occurrence; only 42 members of his class of 95 graduated, about average for the period.<sup>21</sup> Haile's brief experience there benefited him several ways during the war: 29 graduates of the Class of 1840 saw service in Mexico and Haile had contact with many, first while a reporter and later as a fellow officer.<sup>22</sup> His training also gave him an understanding of military history and tactics which were often reflected in the reports he sent to the Picayune.

After leaving the academy Haile moved to Louisiana, and on March 19, 1839, married 16-year-old Mary Clarisse Hebert, the sister of his West Point classmate, Paul Hebert. The couple settled at Plaquemine, Louisiana, up the river from New Orleans. Haile became the editor of the Plaquemine Planter's Gazette, farmed, ran a general store and served as an officer in the local militia company.<sup>23</sup> The Picayune observed Haile made his paper "the vehicle of a never ending flow of genuine wit and humor."<sup>24</sup> Haile started corresponding for the Picayune as early as December, 1840, writing a series of letters to the paper during the years before the war which utilized the Southwest School of Humor style to depict plantation life in rural Louisiana. Haile also provided occasional hard news coverage from northern Louisiana before the war. The humor letters, which Haile signed "Curnel

Pardon Jones," established a local literary reputation for him before the war started.<sup>25</sup>

It was in mid-May, 1846 that the Picayune made its decision to hire Haile and send him to the army's headquarters on the Rio Grande, thereby making him the first fulltime newspaper correspondent to cover the war. The awkward wording of the paper's announcement that Haile "was actually" going to be with the army, led the rival Delta to observe in a teasing tone,

Mr. Haile,...a first-rate fellow by the way, has 'actually' left for Matamoros....Now with George Wilkins Kendall to do the fighting, and (Haile) to do the writing, the Mexicans must be, as a matter of course, expunged — wiped clean out of the journals of creation — surrounded by black lines, which will be a barrier to after ages knowing aught of their history —<sup>26</sup>

Haile left New Orleans by boat on May 18 and reached Fort Polk at Point Isabel on May 25. His first report to the Picayune appeared May 30. In it he correctly predicted,

...the fighting having ceased for some weeks to come, at least,...I am inclined to think there will be no more of it on the Rio Grande. Our army must seek the enemy in their own country if they desire to meet them in any considerable bodies.<sup>27</sup>

Haile immediately began to collect first-hand accounts and anecdotes about the battles of May 8-9, and to make observations regarding life in the various army camps. A number of officers who had participated in the two days of fighting opened their private journals to him, and he started inserting accounts of individuals and units into his numerous letters to the Picayune. "I do not believe that serious inaccuracies exist in any of these

narratives," he assured the editors.<sup>28</sup> His interviews in the camps also led him to take a position to which he returned frequently while covering the army. He wrote;

The officers who have undergone so many dangers and privations during this war are becoming disgusted and discouraged with the thousand ridiculous and injurious reports that have emanated from irresponsible sources. These scribblers frequently praise, censure, or omit to mention the deeds of members of the army, without the slightest regard to truth.... Our officers and men have acted nobly in this war — their country is justly proud of their achievements, and the press should be ready on all occasions to defend them against any imputations that could arise from the idle tattle of busy-bodies.<sup>29</sup>

While such support for the army's officers is understandable from a former West Point cadet, it should be noted Haile did not limit his support for the army to the upper ranks. He was among the first writers in the camps to criticize the poor pay for privates and other non-commissioned ranks. Privates were paid only \$7 a month. In addition to calling for improvements in salaries, Haile urged better equipment and transport be provided for the army; more activity for the volunteer units to "quiet the restless spirits among them;" taking the captured Mexican brass and copper shell and using them for medals for "men of all grades" in the battles of May 8-9; and the promotion of younger officers to fill a large number of vacancies in the higher ranks. Haile noted only seven of 33 "field grade positions" allocated for the army (majors and above) were filled. In the past he noted it took an army officer a lifetime to reach higher ranks, and as a result "the majority of the field officers at the breaking out

of the Mexican war were in the decline of life." He urged an honorable retirement "for those who have grown gray and infirm in the service," and the promotion of "younger officers who have distinguished themselves" to fill the openings.<sup>30</sup>

The volunteer units were in great confusion, he noted, but promised a detailed report as soon as they settled in. "The suttlers," Haile wrote, "put the screws to the poor soldiers here at a cruel rate in the way of charges."<sup>31</sup> Haile was somewhat appalled by the Rio Grande campsites. Lacking experience and leadership, they picked locations which lacked clean water and lay exposed to the harsh sun.

The volunteer units already were starting to "suffer severely" from the effects of bad water, Haile observed, and a number were "very much weakened and emaciated by dysentary." (The relationship between germs and disease was unknown at the time). In one of his first letters to the Picayune Haile also put his finger on a problem which was to trouble the army throughout the two years in Mexico. "Nothing disheartens the volunteers so much as inactivity," he wrote. Inactivity was to be blamed for the army's problem, many times by many writers.<sup>32</sup>

Sand fleas, flies, mosquitos, spiders, scorpions and blowing sand added to the troops' mounting unhappiness. Shortages of supplies, particularly good tents, compounded the situation, as did the changeable weather. Days were often hot and still, but rainy spells turned many of the camps into mud bowls, and sudden thunder storms frequently flattened the flimsy tents. Soon after his arrival at Point Isabel, Haile told of a wild

night he spent chasing "a certain dilapidated straw hat" he liked across the sand dunes after a sudden gale "stripped my tent as if it had been a sheet of tissue paper."<sup>33</sup> Haile also had some fun walking around for several days in a Mexican army brown linen summer coat which had been found on the battlefield; "it came into my possession as a reward, no doubt, for what I might have done had I been in the battles," he wrote.<sup>34</sup> On another occasion, when heavy rains had left pools in many of the camps, Haile told of an encounter with "mosquitoes — none of your common sized Louisiana mosquitoes, but the genuine Mexican gal-linippers." He wrote: "They came in clouds, fairly encrusting our horses and filling our eyes, noses, and mouths, and biting — it makes me shudder even now to think of it."<sup>35</sup> Even mosquito nets failed to help, Haile said, because there was no way to spread them in the outdoor camp sites without getting insects inside the net. "We were at last obliged to lie down and satisfy the appetite of those we had taken to bed with us," he explained, adding, "Our eyes and noses were badly swollen when we rose."<sup>36</sup>

Kendall reached Point Isabel June 4, 1846, and Haile joined forces temporarily with the Picayune editor. They visited the dragoon camp nearby, then traveled to Matamoros. In addition to the various camp sites, Haile also visited the army hospitals and toured the two battlefields. The hospitals he found in generally good condition, except for "millions of house flies."<sup>37</sup> He found the battlefields still covered with bodies of Mexicans and horses. "The buzzards and wild dogs were fattening upon the carrion," he wrote. Haile, with his military knowledge, was

impressed with the effectiveness of the American artillery and gave a detailed description of its effectiveness upon the Mexican troops:

Some had been nearly severed in two by cannon balls. Others had lost part of the head, both legs, a shoulder or the whole stomach. Of many of them nothing but the bones, encased in uniform, was left; whilst others had been transformed into mummies and retained the expression of countenance which their death agonies had stamped upon them....<sup>38</sup>

Haile was surprised at Matamoros' "pleasant appearance." People were starting to return to its street, he noted, "and good-looking female faces are seen looking forth from the windows." Commenting on the rising number of attacks against volunteers, Haile commented, "The inhabitants that remain...are mostly of the lowest class, and they appear sullen and inclined to seek revenge....they hate us cordially."<sup>39</sup>

Haile also made a first-hand inspection of another American import to the Rio Grande — the Mississippi steamboat. "The idea of a steamer ascending such a stream as the Rio Grande at night, at the rate of eight miles an hour, and with no soul on board who had ever navigated the river before is wonderful, and has created a sensation here," he wrote from Matamoros.<sup>40</sup> The boats soon became the backbone of the army's supply route in the Rio Grande Valley, moving men and supplies forward when Taylor started his drive towards Monterrey and the interior. The correspondents made liberal use of the boats for travel and sending their letters to the papers back in the States.

A number of Haile's letters during the summer interlude

before the army drove into the interior dealt with life in the camps. Describing the numerous military bands on the scene, Haile commented, "The music is soul-stirring enough to open the eyes of the veriest sluggard in camp....No fond mother ever used more ingenious or honied language to win her darling from its bed in good humor than these musicians do...."<sup>41</sup> Generally, the arriving volunteers were mostly bewildered. "Volunteers are constantly arriving fresh from home and 'full of glory,' though a little subdued by sea-sickness.... Water is found to be brackish...The poor fellows are exposed to a burning sun, surrounded by white, hot sand and choked with thirst...."<sup>42</sup> He gave this description of the scene:

The beach at the landing is strewn with barrels, boxes, baggage, hay, horses, wagons, drums, muskets and a thousand other articles, and a thousand or two of men — soldiers arrived, soldiers discharged, boatmen, sailors, fishermen, Mexicans, dogs, oyster shanties, coffee tents, sick men, Dutch, Irish, English, Italian, Spanish, Yankees, Virginians, Buckeyes, Pukes, suckers, Creoles of Louisiana, Mississippians, Chinese, Indians, Carolinians, negroes, and representatives of all of the nations of the earth.<sup>43</sup>

Haile spent considerable time traveling from camp to camp, visiting with regulars and volunteers, and interviewing various officers. Character studies of many of the people he talked with started to fill his letters, providing the Picayune (and other newspapers which copied his letters) with depth accounts of army men who were becoming popular heroes. This description of Army Captain C.A. May, one of the more popular military figures of the war, is typical of Haile's work:



He is a soldier, heart, hand and soul. In height he is about six feet four inches, rather slim, but bountifully supplied with bone and sinew, with a beard hanging down upon his breast, and his hair resting upon his shoulders — his figure as straight as an arrow, a clear blue eye, handsome teeth, and in the very prime of manhood, say 28 to 30 years of age; his appearance is as distingue as the most romantic could desire for one whose courage and activity has won for him so high a name.... In his manners he is frank and pleasing, but there is energy in all that he say or does.<sup>44</sup>

As romantic as such descriptions were, they were typical of the writing from the army camps, particularly early in the war. As the war wore on, political, sectional and inter-branch rivalries, prejudice and envy became factors in some of the reporting.

An important news source for Haile was Taylor himself. Like most of the writers with the army Haile had a high opinion of the commander. "The old gentleman goes polking about just like other folks," Haile wrote admiringly, after observing Taylor riding around camp looking for newspapers one morning.<sup>45</sup> In August at Camargo, as the army was preparing for its assault on Monterrey, Haile watched Taylor reviewing his troops, and wrote:

He was on his war-horse, which he rode with more grace than usual, and his coat and forage cap were in apple-pie order; in short, a stranger would not have been surprised, as some are, when told that they saw before them the hero of the glorious 8th and 9th. The more I see of General Taylor the more I am impressed with the conviction that he is a man of extraordinary ability, and the very man to occupy the place that he does.<sup>46</sup>

On another occasion Haile related one of many Taylor anecdotes which made their way into the papers about volunteer troops going "to take a peep at the old lion." "The General's

tent is just like those around him, only perhaps, a little more so," Haile explained. For this reason, and the fact Taylor used little of the formality of a military commander, the volunteers often had trouble identifying him. Haile related:

(The volunteers) saw an honest looking elderly man seated in a tent eight or ten feet off and neither knowing or caring who he was, they chatted awhile rather loudly, canvassing the merits and demerits of 'Old Zach,' some saying he was 'a d--ned tough old cock;' others that he was 'pretty d--ned tight on the Americans sometimes.' Finally they struck up Old Dan Tucker in real Kentucky style, beating time on the benches, not uproariously, but heartily.

At first Taylor had paid no attention to their comments, Haile related, but finally sent an aide to quiet them. As the aide approached, the volunteers spoke out:

'See here...I'll bet that yonder is old Zach!' "On, h--ll no!" exclaimed another positively, 'that old General Taylor!' and he laughed the other into silence. But the first speaker thought he would make sure, and so he stepped up to (the officer) and asked, 'Is that the old fellow, yonder?' pointing towards the General. 'What old fellow do you mean?'... 'Why the old general — that ain't him, is it?' 'That is General Taylor, yes sir'....'The h--ll it is,' exclaimed the fellow, stalking off after old Rough and Ready — 'come on boys! that's him, by Jupiter, I told you so!'— and the company started off in pursuit of their game.<sup>47</sup>

In a similar anecdote related by Haile "an honest looking Ohio volunteer" enters Taylor's tent unannounced:

He took off his cap as he entered and remarked, 'This is Mister Taylor, isn't it?' 'Yes,' said the General, 'take a seat, sir.' 'I must have your hand once,' said the honest fellow stepping forward and grasping the General's extended hand. 'That does me good,' he added in a low voice, as he turned to seat

himself. Although as rough as the outside of a shell-bark hickory tree, when interrupted in the midst of important business, General Taylor is exceedingly urbane and kind in his manners, generally speaking.<sup>48</sup>

Such stories, sprinkled through many of the reporters' stories, added to the popular Taylor image of an accessible, unpretentious leader, willing to meet volunteer and professional troops alike. It supported the democratic idea of all men being equal, generals and volunteer privates alike. Taylor is portrayed as a great but ordinary man, who shakes the hand of even privates — the common man — and asks them to sit and talk with him. This image, constantly nurtured in the media coverage of the time, was to aid Taylor immeasurably when he ran for President in 1848.

These items also demonstrate Haile's ability to tell a story. His use of dialogue, particularly vernacular dialogue, gives life, color and humor to many of the incidents he related from the camps. As a writer he repeatedly exhibited a double personality: one, a formal, patriotic side which praised the army and America unquestioningly, and insisted others should do so too; the other, that of a light-hearted humorist, who used wit, dialogue and exaggerated characters to poke fun at the serious, sometimes pretentious side of life.

In one story he related, Haile told how the troops at Fort Brown during its bombardment in May, 1846 had to frequently dodge artillery shells. On one occasion an incoming shell caused a group of officers to fall flat on the ground.

The shell came fizzling down, close by them.  
'I wonder if she'll bust?' remarked the waggish

(Lieut. H); 'she's a d---l of a long time about it, anyhow.' Hardly were the words uttered when a tremendous explosion replied to them, and h's head went down like a lump of lead. Pretty soon, the pieces began to fall, with a pattering sound, around them. 'Now we'll catch it,' remarked H.... 'There it comes,' said he, as he saw a large fragment descending rapidly, directly upon his back.... 'Twas useless to dodge, for he might roll himself directly in the way of it, so he 'lay and took it.' The piece hit him plumb between the shoulders. 'Hoo,' grunted H., and his friends sprang forward to see if he was dead. 'Are you hurt, H.?' 'No said he coolly, rising and shaking his coat, but a fellow might as well be killed as scared to death!'<sup>49</sup>

Haile's use of dialogue and action verbs -- such as fizzle, pattering, roll, grunt, shake -- add to the entertainment value of the story. In another story he uses a device popular with writers at the time -- the Irish joke. In it an Irish corporal, recently arrested for taking a shot at a bull and almost hitting some nearby troops, berates his wife for drinking too much.

The corporal accused his spouse...of taking a drop too much now and then, and seemed to be silencing her batteries very fast, when she broke out with, 'Ah, yes, and its a soger ye calls yerself, isn't it, to be sure! A nice soger, 'pon the life of me, you, that shot at a bull and missed a whole regiment -- get out wide ye, and don't talk to me.'<sup>50</sup>

Haile also occasionally had a laugh at his own expense. While in Camargo in August covering the army's preparations for the attack on Monterrey, Haile spent some time observing and describing Mexican customs. "These Mexicans are a primitive people in their habits," he analyzed, as he described plowing of fields, tortilla making and washing clothes and drawing water at the river. "I am told by some of my bachelor friends, on whose taste

I can rely, that there is always 'a right smart sprinkling' of pretty feet and ankles to be seen on such occasions," he wrote. One morning Haile rose early in order to take a bath in the river before the Mexican women arrived to take their daily baths.

After selecting an obscure place, I plunged in, and was enjoying the refreshing element, when I heard female voices descending the steep bank to the very nook I had chosen! There was no escape...my clothes were on shore and might be carried off...I was caught!

The correspondent attempted to hide behind a barrel which was floating near the shore hoping three young girls coming to the water's edge would not see him.

I raised my head suddenly above the barrel hoping to frighten them away, but to my surprise (a) fair senorita, instead of being startled, very politely bid me 'buenos dias,' and all hands began to show unmistakeable signs of joining me in my aquatic exercise. This rendered me desperate, and forgetting every thing like gallantry, I sang out 'Vamos! Vamos!' at them, but they only laughed at my poor effort at Spanish, and went on with their preparations.

In a final desperate move, Haile sprayed the girls with mud and water, and they reluctantly moved off. "Instances of this kind occur here every day," Haile concluded, solemnly.<sup>51</sup>

No where is Haile's humor more evident than in his "Curnel Pardon Jones" letters. Haile had developed his Pardon Jones character as early as 1840, and constantly refined it in the years prior to the start of the war in a long series of letters to the Picayune. The letters commented on society, customs and life on Louisiana's plantations, changing social conditions in America,

and, as the war drew closer, the dispute with Mexico. Pardon Jones was the fictional commander of a New England volunteer militia unit, "The Dead Cow Brook Artillery." The letters to the Picayune about Pardon Jones' adventures used a mixture of misspelling, slang, vernacular dialogue and exaggerated characterization to convey humor. The characterization, although appearing infrequently, had wide appeal, the Picayune often reported. As early as 1842 the paper had gushed, "We are sure Pardon is the most popular man of his generation."<sup>52</sup>

Ten Pardon Jones "war letters" appeared sporadically in the Picayune over a period of 14 months, from September 10, 1845, to November 11, 1846. The letters had started commenting about the possibility of war with Mexico when Taylor first went to Corpus Christi, Texas, and when the American army moved to the Rio Grande the fictional "curnel" soon followed. During Haile's visits to the army camps along the border Pardon Jones commented humorously about facets of army life. The letters ended abruptly on the last date with Pardon Jones explaining his "exploits" in the battle of Monterrey to President Polk.

The Pardon Jones letters remain the most creative part of Haile's work during the war. They are distinctly in the style of the "Old Southwest" school of humor, an ante-bellum style which used regional vernacular, exaggerated incidents and slapstick characterization as its staple items. Haile's style also had traces of Seba Smith's Major Jack Downing, out of the Down-East School. Haile's application of the form is unique to the war

events of the day which were occurring around him. Like most humor its effectiveness has faded with time. But it still retains qualities of originality, wit, liveliness and clues to the American character of the day. The first of the letters from Haile while he was with the army appeared in the Picayune, July 16, 1846. Typical of the other Pardon Jones letters, it started:

LETTER FROM PARDON JONES

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Mattymorus  
Junne the 20 tooth, 1846

My Dear Pic: -The war is goin' on glorusly. I'n Captin' Potter has jest got farely intu the sperrit on't, and you won't see no more on us till you hear that diffikilties is eended.

My regiment is camped in a house, in this town. Ginrel Taylor hasn't made no 'jection tu our stayin' in the army, and he's right, for if he gets intu a snap with the Mexicans he'll know where tu look for a reed tu lean on. 'Fore we come intu town tu camp, we had our tents pitched over 'tother side, and had a good deal of trouble tu keep the privates in order. We've got only three privates left in the regiment, and they give us more trouble then all the officers put together, besides bein' a bad example for the officers. If ever I go tu the wars agin with my regiment, I shan't take no private along.<sup>53</sup>

In his final letters, following the battle at Monterrey, the "curnel" reports to General Taylor the "extraornary conduct of my ridgement, and as I'm the curnel, of coarse, the fust honners comes tu me." He closes by assuring Taylor, "You've dun your duty, Ginral, and I shall speak to Mr. Polk." As promised,

he follows with a "report" to the president:

To Jamie K. Polk, our President tu Washington:  
My Deer Frend — As a good many reports is going home about capterin this devoted city, I take my pen in hand tu do myself justice, and to inform you that I took it myself! It ain't necessary for me to prove this, for fax is stubborn things. I have been very hansumly supported in this glorious acheevement by Ginral Taylor and his army, speshly by the 2d Division, the officers is all officers of great Ginral Worth, or of great worth ginrally, which is the same thing backwards. I feel very greatfull for this assistance, and hope none of these gullant men will be overlooked when you come to reward me. I don't want to cast nobody in the shade, but want to have the sun of your good graces shine putty bright and warm on my patriotic fame.<sup>54</sup>

Pardon Jones emerges from Haile's letters as a second generation character in the Old Southwest school of humor. However, the character shows influences from the Down East school of Jack Downing, and the western school of Davy Crockett. While the use of a wholly fictional character to relate some aspects of life in the army is unique, Haile's more important contribution, which was of much greater volume, was that of straight reporting.

James L. Frenner of the New Orleans Delta was another of the first writers on the scene. His letters to the paper started as early as May 20, 1846, but his more important work in reporting the war came during its second year when General Winfield Scott marched from Vera Cruz to Mexico City. Frenner was born and raised in Hagerstown, Maryland, before making his way to New Orleans. He was working as assistant editor at the Delta when the first call for volunteers came, and he joined the Louisiana



regiment immediately.<sup>55</sup> He was in the first batch of volunteers to arrive at Point Isabel and soon dug up a story that on the day Taylor set out to meet the Mexicans he was dressed in "simple farmer's apparel" and rode in a light wagon driven by a Negro servant.<sup>56</sup>

Freaner had some trouble selecting a pseudonym he liked, and used "Corporal" and "Lancer" before settling on "Mustang" in June, 1846. He used that name for the remainder of the war, and before it ended "Mustang" and Freaner were as well known to the nation's press and public as any of the war's correspondents.<sup>57</sup> One of the first publications to recognize Freaner's ability was Niles National Register, the Baltimore newsmagazine which reprinted many of the letters from the New Orleans papers. It called his letters from Matamoros "exceedingly lively and well written articles."<sup>58</sup> His work was "keeping the public well posted on the Rio Grande," according to the Register.

Unfortunately for Freaner and the other New Orleans newsmen who had joined the first rush of volunteers to the Rio Grande, their work quickly came to an end. It finally became clear it would take all summer to build up Taylor's army to the point it could march further into Mexico. In the meantime the 90-day enlistment term of the Louisiana Volunteers ran out. By early June Freaner reported, "We are now lying here in the most perfect state of 'masterly inactivity' that can possibly be imagined." The camp was full of rumors that Taylor was going to march to Monterrey, he noted, but "we all know very well that

Gen. Taylor...will 'have to wait for the wagon.' At present we have not got sufficient ammunition, provisions, or the means of transport for one-half the army...."<sup>59</sup>

Several other early correspondents from the Delta staff got caught in the same bind of "masterly inactivity." Thomas Stringer, a former Delta reporter, was serving as a captain in the Louisiana Regiment. Signing his letters "Tom," he had started publishing material in the Delta on May 20, 1846. In one of his first letters to the paper he reported en route "sea-sickness, as usual, assailed every landsman, your humble servant coming in for a full share."<sup>60</sup> Stringer's military activities took most of his time, apparently, for his letters stopped abruptly. Another of the early correspondents to reach the camps was John C. Larue of the Delta, who wrote under the name "Our Private." He wrote letters to the Delta throughout the summer, mostly general observations about camp life. However, he had no hesitation in leaving the army to return to New Orleans when the Louisiana volunteers were mustered out. "It was much too boring to wait for the next battle," he explained in the Delta.<sup>61</sup>

Another member of the Louisiana volunteers who was to continue writing from the camps throughout the war was George H. Tobin, a New Orleans reporter and soldier of fortune. Tobin was working for the Delta when the fighting broke out and his letters, some serious but most filled with humorous sketches about army life, appeared in that paper throughout the two years. The Delta

frequently referred to him as "our favorite correspondent" or as "that prince of epistolizers."<sup>62</sup> Tobin was born in Wicklow, Ireland, and attended Trinity College in Dublin before traveling to the United States. He had a good understanding of the classics, and occasionally quoted them in his articles. Referring to his Irish background, the Delta said teasingly he had been "raised on goat's milk...and this may account in some measure for his eccentricities."<sup>63</sup> He apparently had seen some prior military service in Florida, and was among the first of the New Orleans newspapermen to volunteer when the fighting broke out.<sup>64</sup> His first letter from the army appeared in the Delta June 16, 1846, but he only wrote occasionally during that summer. After the Louisiana volunteers were disbanded in August Tobin returned to New Orleans and began the humorous sketches which were to earn him a national reputation.

Although he was not an officer, he started writing under the title, "Notes from my Knapsack. By G.H. Tobin, Late Captain Louisiana Volunteers." This was later shortened by the Delta to read "From Tobin's Knapsack" or, occasionally, "From Capt. Tobin." Tobin never made captain but the Delta said it would always call him "Captain Tobin" simply because "He is one although he never has worn an epilet."<sup>65</sup>

The first Knapsack article appeared in the Delta on September 23, 1846. Like many of the subsequent articles, it dealt with the differences in the attitudes of the regulars and volunteers toward army regulations. Most of the humor was based

on puns ("The men called the three of us the Siamese Twins") or play on words ("my company conglomerated and promiscuously just mixed up.").<sup>66</sup> Regarding Tobin's humor, the Delta once explained: "There is a good deal of George's humor which we would like to soften and modify, but it is a difficult and dangerous task, and we must give him with all his faults, praying that our readers will bear in mind he is a wild, rollicking dragoon, who, in his multifarious duties hasn't time to polish and refine (his) style."<sup>67</sup> The Philadelphia North American in praising Tobin's "humorous letters" added: "He is a soldier, every inch of him.... There is no whipping such a man as George H. Tobin."<sup>68</sup> The Baltimore Sun said his Knapsack items were "rich and rare," and on the whole "if not trenching on the sublime, belong at least to the beautiful."<sup>69</sup> The St. Louis Reveille believed his work to be the "most original" being sent by the writers in Mexico.<sup>70</sup>

One of the most important, productive and enterprising newsmen during the war was George Wilkins Kendall of the Picayune. He has been called the first American war correspondent, and while among the first, it's not quite true to say he was the first (as can be seen in this chapter). Kendall's work was widely reprinted around the country, however, and by the end of the war he was recognized as its leading correspondent.<sup>71</sup>

Although Kendall was co-editor of the Picayune, he had little taste for desk work, and was a reporter in the field for most of his career. Prior to the Mexican War he traveled extensively throughout Texas. In 1841 he was captured by Mexican

troops along with more than 200 Texans on an expedition to Santa Fe and was imprisoned in Mexico City for six months.<sup>72</sup> When Kendall returned to New Orleans in 1844 he wrote the adventures of his capture and imprisonment in a 900-page book, Narrative of the Texan Santa Fe Expedition.<sup>73</sup> It became a best seller for its time, 40,000 copies being purchased over the next eight years, and greatly expanded the national reputation of its author. Kendall explained that he wrote the book because he wanted "to tell his story in a plain, unvarnished way — in the homely, every-day language which is at once understood by all."<sup>74</sup> Most of Kendall's writing is characterized by the "plain, unvarnished" easily understood style he sought.

Kendall was an avid outdoorsman, and went hunting and exploring across the vast Texas expanses at every opportunity. In the process he became an outspoken booster of the region's future. One biographer has written that he became one of that state's "greatest publicists. His enthusiasm for Texas was unbounded — exaggerated, a non-Texan might sometimes think...."<sup>75</sup> One one occasion the Boston Post published a letter Kendall had written to a New England friend about the future of Texas, and the Picayune editor received 300 letters from interested parties. "Croakers" was the term Kendall reserved for those who belittled the future of the state.<sup>76</sup>

Unlike some other Southern journalists at the time, Kendall clearly was not an extremist. But, at the same time, he clearly supported slavery as an institution, hated Abolitionists,

and was concerned the blacks were getting "saucy and impudent."<sup>77</sup>

He was widely known for his sense of humor and story telling.

Frederic Hudson of the New York Herald said Kendall "was the most widely known" of the New Orleans journalists:

He never lost a joke, or a bit of wit, or scrap of humor, or a ray of sunshine. He had a keen appreciation of those pleasant, healthy elements of life and happiness. If a bright thought was uttered in his presence he would 'take a note of it'....If a spark of wit flitted across his vision, Kendall would rescue it from oblivion....He became a Treasury of Wit.<sup>78</sup>

Kendall's writing on the Santa Fe expedition and during the Mexican War "gave great character to the Picayune," Hudson stated, adding his war letters were "excellent...and very graphic."<sup>79</sup> In another view, the St. Louis Reveille observed "all but a few" had taken an interest in Kendall's adventures in Mexico, and that his reporting was "praised by all."<sup>80</sup>

Kendall apparently did not expect the war to start as soon as it did. In early April, 1846 he traveled into north central Texas to report on a council the United States government was holding with the Indian tribes of the new state. Although this moved him closer geographically to Taylor's forces, he was out of touch with the events on the Rio Grande because of the isolated location of the council grounds. A special courier finally caught up with him on May 21, thirteen days after the first battle occurred.<sup>81</sup>

Hearing the news, Kendall decided to start for the border immediately. It required a 400-mile trip across the barren,

roadless state for the reporter to catch up with the American forces. Kendall's description of the journey in letters to the Picayune provides some insight to the man and the conditions in Texas at the time. It rained for the first 10 days of the 17-day trip, forcing him to dismount frequently to cross swollen streams and rivers. One day, after riding 30 miles in pouring rain, he wrote, "We reached our lodging house, soaked through and through, and although we were obliged to sleep on the floor, in a small room with 15 persons of all nations and all languages, contrived to get through the night comfortably enough."<sup>82</sup>

Kendall had started in company with another rider, but when this slowed him down he continued alone. Crossing the full length of Texas moved him to return to an old theme with his Picayune readers. He observed: "We made a most excellent bargain when we got this new state." But the trip was taking its toll, and he added, "One does not feel after riding thirty or thirty-five miles, altogether so much like writing as he might...."<sup>83</sup>

Nearing the end of his journey Kendall joined up with a large group of Texas volunteers headed south for the army camps. Kendall reported it was necessary for the group to travel at night, "owing to the heat of the noon-day and the swarms of prairie flies that annoy our horses...." For food the volunteers killed wild bulls, which Kendall noted were "tough as wagon tires...and required a bark mill to grind and digest it."<sup>84</sup>

Kendall's long trip ended June 6 when he reached Fort Polk

at Point Isabel. Haile, a friend of the Picayune editor for several years, noted Kendall looked, "rather thin from hard riding, but in other respects in good order and well conditioned."<sup>85</sup> Another Picayune correspondent wrote, "Our friend is just in from the region where the summer uniform is a 'piece of rope around the waist.'"<sup>86</sup>

Kendall apparently was satisfied with the extensive coverage Haile and other Picayune correspondents were providing from the camps. Although he continued to send letters almost daily to the Picayune, the editor concentrated on extending the paper's network of correspondents. Like Haile, Kendall heard a number of anecdotes about the opening battles, but he avoided reporting them, observing, "A man does not like to carry about a note book to clap down every story he listens to."<sup>87</sup>

In Matamoros Kendall made arrangements to join the Texas Ranger company of Captain Benjamin McCullough, which was to scout the road to Monterrey for Taylor. It was a "Texas spy company," in Kendall's words.<sup>88</sup> McCullough's company of 70 men departed Matamoros on July 7, and headed for Reynoso, on the road to Monterrey. Kendall later wrote a description of his trip to the Picayune:

The road is crooked enough at the best of times; but now that the Rio Grande is over its banks, we were obliged to turn out into the high and dry chaparral a dozen times, and had to wade, dig and flounder through water, mud and mire until the patience of men and strength of the poor horses was entirely exhausted. And then the weather...a hot sun over head and not a breath of air stirring...verily this thing of scouting



through Mexico may be exciting enough, but it is far from being agreeable....<sup>89</sup>

In another letter he said:

Pleasant country this! but rather hard on that portion of the American people this side of the Rio Grande. Do you know that I sometimes think of the St. Charles, the Verandah and of Hewlett's — their sumptuous dinners and comfortable beds!<sup>90</sup>

After Kendall had left with McCullough's company, Haile remained behind to provide the Picayune's regular correspondence from the army. Haile commented wherever Kendall was "he has enjoyed the luxury of a shower-bath every day since they have been out." "With his usual luck," Haile said of Kendall, "he will see the elephant again. He has become so familiar with the animal, though, that the critter no longer looks formidable to him."<sup>91</sup>

As the war continued Kendall made a number of these trips into the field, sending back a steady stream of correspondence to the Picayune. The paper maintained an interesting relationship with him while he was in the field. It frequently called attention to and supported his opinions regarding the war's progress and the performance of the various Mexican and American participants. Kendall's opinions were widely quoted in the American press; phrases such as "Mr. Kendall says....," "Mr. Kendall believes....," and "Mr. Kendall thinks..." appeared frequently in letters and telegraph summaries.<sup>92</sup> The paper also was proud of Kendall's efforts to obtain and forward his reports, noting, "We hope our readers will recognize in Mr. Kendall's enterprise his characteristic energy and liberality — a

determination to do everything in his power to promote the character and interest of this paper."<sup>93</sup> At the same time, the Picayune staff at home, primarily co-editors A.M. Holbrook and A.C. Bullitt, retained the right to disagree with Kendall. "We by no means agree with him," the paper said after printing his analysis of the American master war plan in May, 1847.<sup>94</sup> But it usually was quick to add, "He has facilities for forming an opinion on the subject which (we do not)."<sup>95</sup>

Kendall's partner Lumsden also went to the war zone in Summer, 1846. He had been selected the head of a volunteer company called the Gaines Rangers. The Picayune co-editor received a commission as a captain in the unit, and had agreed to accompany it to Taylor's army. Lumsden reached Galveston on June 21, 1846, and immediately started writing letters to the Picayune.<sup>96</sup> Lumsden celebrated the Fourth of July at the tiny town of Egypt, Texas, where, he wrote, "there is no good water to be had, the temperature is 98° in the shade and no one in the place has ever seen ice...." He observed the holiday "with a small party of Gaines' Rangers, by quaffing them down in old rye for want of something more agreeable and listening to our thumping of tin cups on the counter...."<sup>97</sup>

Lumsden spent some of his time visiting the battlefields at Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma, where he observed, "There is something that is beautiful in these (fields)...the soft and waving grass of the one and the deep green chapparral of the other. Yet there, where all was still and silent and beautiful,

man had met his fellow man in deadly strife, sabre had clashed against sabre, and the earth had drunk the life of valorous men..."<sup>98</sup> Lumsden soon made arrangements to join one of the Texan scout companies, as had Kendall and the Delta's Freaner. Following the occupation of the town of San Fernando in northern Mexico in August, 1846 Lumsden wrote to the Picayune, "We are staying in (the mansion) of Senor Don Ramos de la Garza Flores... (who) is immensely rich and lives in the finest style. And here your humble servant and his messmates are comfortably stored away, each of us with a separate bed, servants to attend us, and 'living in clover,' as if there were no war...."<sup>99</sup> Lumsden did not enjoy the long trips into the field, however, and returned to New Orleans in early September, a decision which cost him an opportunity to participate in the coverage of the war's first major action at Monterrey.<sup>100</sup> Most important at this point was Haile's "Pardon Jones." The main thrust of Pardon Jones is in the South. This particular lineage had a number of noted satirical writers and characters, including: A.B. Longstreet ("Georgia Scenes, 1830); William Tappan Thompson ("Major Joseph Jones," 1840); Johnson J. Hooper (Simon Suggs, 1845); John B. Lamar ("Polly Pearblossom's Wedding," 1851); Joseph G. Baldwin ("Flush Times in Alabama," 1853); and G.W. Harris ("Sut Lovingood," 1867). Charles Farrar Browne's famous character "Artemus Ward" (1858), was influenced by the Old Southwest group, and in a third generation writers such as Mark Twain and Joel Chandler Harris benefited from its influence.

Haile's Pardon Jones letters, as a whole, are good but not great. Historian Walter Blair has noted Southern characters of the period often were fun, but not necessarily smart or insightful in most matters. Pardon Jones appears to fit this evaluation. He shows occasional wit and brightness, and certainly serves as a tool to help understand American society of that day. But the literary quality is limited. Haile's ability appears to fit the evaluation of another scholar of the period, who observed writers of the Old Southwest produced "a kind of subliterature, appropriate to gifted amateurs, who could be sure of sufficient local and ephemeral appreciation."

## NOTES

1. Smith, op. cit., Chaps. 11-12.
2. For a biography of Thorpe see Milton Rickels, Thomas Bangs Thorpe, Humorist of the Old Southwest (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1962).
3. Ibid., p. 96.
4. Ibid., pp. 76-7, 266.
5. New Orleans Delta, April 1, 1846.
6. Rickels, op. cit., p. 267.
7. Ibid., p. 123.
8. Ibid., pp. 119-20.
9. Charleston Courier, June 11, 1846.
10. New Orleans Tropic, June 2, 1846, quoted in Charleston Courier, June 11, 1846.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Quoted in Rickels, op. cit., pp. 156-7.
15. For examples see Baltimore Sun, June 8, 26, 1846; Charleston Courier, June 11, 1846.
16. Rickels, op. cit., p. 123.
17. Ibid., pp. 154-6.
18. Ibid., p. 151.
19. Thayer Memorial Edition, Register of Graduates and Former Cadets of the United States Military Academy, 1964. (West Point: The West Point Alumni Foundation, Inc., 1964), pp. 226-7.
20. New Orleans Picayune, September 15, 1849; Thayer, op. cit., pp. 226-7.
21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.
23. New Orleans Delta February 2, March 5, 19, May 22, 1846.
24. New Orleans Picayune, September 15, 1849.
25. New Orleans Picayune, May 30, 1844.
26. New Orleans Delta, July 22, 1846.
27. New Orleans Picayune, May 30, 1846.
28. Ibid., June 14, 1846.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid., September 8, 1846. Also see July 7, 8 September 11, 1846.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid., June 14, 1846.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid., June 20, 1846.
35. Ibid., July 7, 1846.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid., June 14, 1846.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid., June 16, 1846.
40. Ibid., June 20, 1846.
41. Ibid., July 11, 1846.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid., August 15, 1846.
44. Ibid., June 16, 1846.
45. Ibid., July 7, 1846.
46. Ibid., September 6, 1846.

47. Ibid., September 13, 1846.
48. Ibid.
49. Ibid., September 9, 1846.
50. Ibid. For a discussion of Irish humor and jokes see Earl F. Niehaus, The Irish in New Orleans, 1800-1860 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965) pp. 127-8.
51. New Orleans Picayune, September 8, 1846.
52. Ibid., April 14, 1842.
53. Ibid., July 16, 1846.
54. Ibid., November 11, 1846.
55. New Orleans Delta, November 7, 1847.
56. Copeland, op. cit., p. 157.
57. Ibid., p. 158.
58. Niles National Register, August 1, 1846, p. 341.
59. New Orleans Delta, June 16, 1846.
60. Ibid., May 23, 1846.
61. Ibid., August 6, 1846.
62. Ibid., January 24, August 6, 1847.
63. Ibid., May 12, 1847; April 27, 1848.
64. Philadelphia North American, December 8, 1846.
65. New Orleans Delta, January 24, 1847.
66. Ibid., September 23, 1846.
67. Ibid., February 6, 1848.
68. Philadelphia North American, December 8, 1846.
69. Baltimore Sun, October 8, 1846.
70. St. Louis Reveille, March 28, 1848.

71. For a biography of Kendall's varied career see Fayette Copeland, Kendall of the Picayune (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1943).

72. Ibid., Chap. 8.

73. George Wilkins Kendall, Narrative of the Texan Santa Fe Expedition. (2 vols., New York: Harper and Brothers, 1844).

74. Kendall, Narrative..., op. cit., p. i.

75. See editor's comments in George Wilkins Kendall, Letters From..., op. cit.

76. Ibid., p. 10.

77. Ibid.; Also see his letter from North Hampton, Mass., in New Orleans Picayune, August 30, 1843. Kendall also had an office slave at the paper. See Copeland, op. cit., p. 145 fn.

78. Hudson, op. cit., p. 494.

79. Ibid., pp. 494-5.

80. St. Louis Reveille, December 4, 1847.

81. Copeland, op. cit., pp. 148-150.

82. New Orleans Picayune, May 30, June 3, 1846.

83. Ibid., June 1, 1846.

84. Ibid., June 3, 14, 1846.

85. Ibid., June 14, 1846.

86. Ibid., July 7, 1846.

87. Ibid., June 26, 1846.

88. Ibid., June 20, 26, July 17, 1846.

89. Ibid., July 19, 1846.

90. In 1847, Samuel C. Reid Jr., who was a New Orleans lawyer and a friend of Kendall and had served with the Picayune editor in McCullough's company, used a number of the articles by Kendall, and the Picayune's F.A. Lumsden and Haile for a book, The Scouting Expeditions of McCullough's Texas Rangers, (Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1970 reprint of 1847 edition.) See p. 54.



91. New Orleans Picayune, July 7, 1846. "To see the elephant" was a slang phrase similar to going "to see the world."

92. See examples of telegraphic summaries with his name, see Philadelphia North American, August 28, 1847; Baltimore Sun, June 28, 1847.

93. New Orleans Picayune, August 8, 1847.

94. Ibid., May 19, 1847.

95. Ibid., May 20, 1847.

96. Ibid., June 28, 1846.

97. Ibid., July 21, 1846.

98. Ibid., August 16, 1846.

99. Ibid., September 10, 1846.

100. New Orleans Delta, September 6, 1846.

## CHAPTER 7

### AMERICAN PRINTERS IN MEXICO

With so many printers in the army camps the next step in the reporting of the war seems logical. Since there was no fighting to do, the printers decided to start their own newspapers. This led to a phenomenon seldom repeated in American journalism history — the establishment of "war newspapers" by American printers on foreign soil. Before the war came to an end the enterprising Americans had established no less than 20 such papers at 13 locations, 12 in Mexico and one in the disputed territory in south Texas.<sup>1</sup> Their existence quickly proved a boon to the rest of the nation's press, providing a steady, fresh and fairly timely supply of news about the army and events at the front line.

The first example of this genre appeared four months before the first shot was even fired. By late 1845 it became apparent to enterprising businessmen that Taylor's army on the beaches at Corpus Christi represented the largest community of Americans in Texas. Before long the area took on the appearance of a boom town, and, as often happened in the American frontier

towns, it soon had a newspaper. The Corpus Christi Gazette, organized and published by Samuel Bangs and George W. Fletcher, made its appearance January 1, 1846.<sup>2</sup> The four-page Gazette, bearing the motto "Be Sure You Are Right, Then Go Ahead," published on Thursdays. It carried two pages of general news and literary features, mostly clipped from other newspapers and magazines. Bangs was an experienced Texas printer, and Fletcher a Galveston physician. They hired as their editor Jose de Alba, one of the most important members of the Spanish-speaking community at Corpus Christi.<sup>3</sup>

The appearance of the Gazette was quickly recognized by the rest of the country's press. "We now have our own 'reporter' in camp," Niles National Register commented.<sup>4</sup> But the Gazette was short lived. By February, 1846 Taylor received his marching orders from Washington, and the troops started to break camp. The Gazette, however, became the first paper to announce the destination of the army — Point Isabel in the southeast corner of Texas — and other newspapers made good use of the item.<sup>5</sup>

When Taylor started to move his army south, the Gazette expressed its disapproval:

What they are to do there, and the object of their going, are to us a profound mystery. One thing is certain. If the United States are to occupy the east bank of the Rio Grande,..they must send a much stronger force than the one now here...Instead of black-eyed senoras...we predict that our Army of Occupation will find some less agreeable subjects to digest...

To support its claims, the Gazette added:

Our sources of information are in no way inferior to those of the United States Government itself. The policy which has dictated the removal (of the army)...We have reason to believe is founded in error....<sup>7</sup>

Soon after the army left it became clear the Gazette's usefulness was ending. "We are without any authentic information of the army's movements," it reported in mid-March. But the paper did pinpoint a problem that was to plague the American forces throughout the Mexican conflict — that of deserters and "discharged misfits" who "preyed on the inhabitants of the town." The Gazette called them "incorrigible scoundrels" and urged vigilante action be used to control them.<sup>8</sup> The paper published its final issue, No. 14, on April 2, 1846.<sup>9</sup>

The establishment of the Gazette had not caused an unusual reaction from the nation's newspapers, since it was published on what was considered "American soil," but the next step in the development of the "war newspapers" did. The Gazette's successors appeared on Mexican soil. Before the army had even cleared its camp at Corpus Christi there were indications the printers intended to follow it. In mid-March, as it reported "the main body" of Taylor's army had departed, the New Orleans Delta noted, "When the American army shall be encamped on the Rio Grande, a new paper will probably be immediately established near the encampment, to be styled the Rio Grande Herald."<sup>10</sup> The publishers of the Herald were reported to be Bangs and Gideon Lewis, an editor of the Galveston News.<sup>11</sup> But the Herald never materialized. The printers in the Louisiana regiment also apparently

had plans to start a newspaper at Matamoros soon after the army captured it on May 17. A letter from one, printed in the New Orleans Bee, stated, "We were about issuing an Army Chronicle here, but before we could get possession of the office, someone took it, and paid or agreed to pay the original owner for the use of it."<sup>12</sup>

The someone turned out to be Hugh McLeod, a Texas land promoter, and J.N. Fleeson, a New Orleans printer. They took possession of a Mexican press, one which not too long before had been used for Mexican army propaganda, and, to the delight of the New Orleans papers, turned it to printing news of the American army.<sup>13</sup> They titled their publication The Republic of the Rio Grande. It first appeared on June 1, 1846, printed letter size, with articles in English and Spanish. Patriotic mottoes were another characteristic of the war papers, the Republic's proclaiming: "Fear not - the brave and generous soldier is only to be dreaded on the field of battle."<sup>14</sup> The name of the new paper summed up its purpose. The lead editorial in the first issue urged the people of northern Mexico to revolt and join the United States. The item concluded: "Long live the United States of America! Long live the Republic of Rio Grande!"<sup>15</sup>

When copies of the new paper reached the cities of the South and the Northeast newspaper reaction was at first favorable. The Picayune observed, "The purpose is to convince the people of Tamaulipas, Coahuila, New Leon and Chihuahua (states) of the futility of resisting American arms and to throw upon... (General)

Parades the responsibility of the war..."<sup>16</sup> The New Orleans Tropic considered the new paper "well written" and said "it is calculated to have great effect upon the people to whom it is addressed."<sup>17</sup> The Delta observed "The printing press is following the Yankees" because "it is the oxygen that secures to them their social and political respirations."<sup>18</sup> The New York Sun said such papers were "the mental fruits" of the American occupation,<sup>19</sup> and the Washington Union said it was "proof that the Yankees are there."<sup>20</sup>

The Republic also was greeted by some of the correspondents. Tom Stringer, a former city reporter for the New Orleans Delta who was corresponding to that paper from the army camps, called the Republic "an able advocate." He mailed copies of it to the Delta and noted, "It contains all the information about camp which can be ferretted out...."<sup>21</sup> Another Delta correspondent, John C. Larue, agreed it was a "very neat and ably conducted paper," but opposed its objective of an alliance as it "would involve us in constant difficulties."<sup>22</sup>

Another Delta writer, James Freaner, was quite critical of the new paper. He called it a "small potato affair," adding,

They attempted to use the 'typos' in (the army) but in this they failed. When the boys go a fighting 'they go a fightin'. They offered to take the materials to camp and publish a daily journal and have it sold for the benefit of the regiment, but they were not willing to be used by speculators. This Gen. Taylor was very willing to see them do but the persons who had possession of the materials would not submit....<sup>23</sup>

The Republic's double role of advocating revolution in

northern Mexico and land speculation appears to have been its downfall. In early July the Washington correspondent of the New York Courier and Enquirer reported instructions had been forwarded to Taylor to suppress the paper "because the government does not agree with its object of a revolution in North Mexico."<sup>24</sup> Taylor quickly complied. McLeod was forced out of the publisher's role, and the paper reappeared as the American Flag. (This was one of the first instances of suppression in the war. Censorship is discussed in Chapter 22.)

The Flag was the longest running of the war papers, surviving in Matamoros until October 9, 1848, more than four months after the war officially ended.<sup>25</sup> John N. Peoples, another New Orleans printer, who later was to become one of the war's best known correspondents and editors, joined Palmer in the paper's operation. Peoples formerly had worked for the Delta, and later left the Flag to report for the New Orleans paper from Monterrey. He was replaced by J.R. Palmer.<sup>26</sup> The Flag carried none of the vestiges of the Republic. Fleeson and Palmer set up their shop near the center of the town in a building called "Casa de Steambote." The Flag, carrying the motto "Long May It Wave O're the Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave," published Wednesdays and Saturdays. Although its staple items related to the war and the army, it also contained a wide variety of news from the home front, and numerous literary articles clipped from newspapers, magazines and books. Two of its four pages were filled with advertisements, most of them proclaiming the services

of the small merchants in Matamoros and shipping along the Rio Grande.<sup>27</sup> The continual flow of American military personnel and cargo along the Rio Grande appears to have provided enough income for the Flag to survive. But it was a struggle, at best.

The Picayune made heavy use of the Flag, but was always careful to credit its articles. In January, 1847 the New Orleans paper commented on the enlarged size of the Matamoros publication and urged merchants of the Louisiana city to support it with advertising. "We are always happy to acknowledge our obligations to the Flag for interesting intelligence from the Rio Grande," the Picayune editors wrote.<sup>28</sup> C.M. Haile, the Picayune army correspondent, also helped the Flag by sending it occasional articles.<sup>29</sup> When the Flag switched to a new type face in February, 1847 a correspondent for the New Orleans Delta wrote he thought the "worthy proprietors Fleeson and Palmer deserve every encouragement" to keep the paper going. "Its columns exhibit an amount of literary talent not often found in the papers of the day," he noted.<sup>30</sup> The editor of the Delta agreed, calling the paper "very valuable." He also offered his regrets that the Flag's management did not receive files of all the New Orleans newspapers in return, although they were being mailed regularly.<sup>31</sup> On another occasion the Delta stated: "We are much indebted to the (Flag). It shall be our desire to always reciprocate it."<sup>32</sup>

When the main force of Taylor's army departed from Matamoros in mid-August, 1846 the Flag observed: "All the excitement seems to have left Matamoros and followed the troops to



Camargo...and we are forced to appear before our readers without the variety which has made us so welcome." The paper assured its readers it would continue, but added, "We cannot manufacture news, and if it does not come in the natural course of events, it's nobody's fault."<sup>33</sup> Before long the New Orleans papers were observing the Flag "contains not a word of interest" and "is barren of news."<sup>34</sup>

Fleeson's operation of the Flag during the two war years ended on a note of irony. With business so slow, he attempted to sell his half interest in the paper and the job shop in September, 1847, after a long period of inactivity in the Matamoras area, but failed and stayed on.<sup>35</sup> Just as the war reached its final days he died from tuberculosis — on July 26, 1848 — as the paper's staff was planning to evacuate along with the military. A letter to the New Orleans Crescent noted Fleeson "worshipped the American Flag with all the idolatry of a soul replete with patriotism." Commenting on the efforts of the paper's owners, the letter added, "That we aimed at the honor and glory of the proud name that we adopted, we presume none will dispute." Fleeson was buried at Fort Brown across the river from Matamoras, and the Flag moved to the new Texas community of Brownsville soon after.<sup>36</sup>

Another American paper, the Reveille, named for a St. Louis daily with the same title, appeared in Matamoras on June 24, 1846.<sup>37</sup> It was operated by Samuel Bangs and Gideon Lewis, the two newsmen who had planned but never published the Rio Grande

Herald. The Reveille's motto was one of the longest of the war: "We Must Ever Maintain the Principle that the People of this Continent Alone have the Right to Decide Their Own Destiny."<sup>38</sup> Bangs and Lewis brought the paper out on Mondays and Fridays. The Reveille, printed in English and Spanish, apparently had production problems to overcome since the front page of the paper appeared on the back of four-page sheet, and page four on the front. The third page carried a separate nameplate, La Diana de Matamoros, and was printed entirely in Spanish. The Spanish-language page caused problems for the Reveille with the American military authorities and they closed the entire publication for a brief time. (Discussed in Chapter 22.) After a satisfactory explanation to General Taylor, Bangs and Lewis were allowed to resume.

An item in the first issue of the paper headed "How to Write for a Newspaper" explained:

1. Have something to write about.
2. Write plain: dot your i's, cross your t's, point your sentences.
3. Begin with capitals.
4. Write short: to the point; stop when you have done.
5. Write only on one side of a leaf.
6. Read it over, abridge and correct it, until you get it into the shortest space possible.
7. Pay the postage.<sup>39</sup>

The editors assured correspondents any letter not written on only one side of a sheet "stands an excellent chance of getting into the stove." There was not enough business in Matamoros to sustain two papers, however, and after two months the Reveille was

discontinued.<sup>40</sup>

Before the war ended many more of these publications appeared. There were a number of attempts by Americans to analyze their appearance. Secretary of the Navy John Y. Mason, speaking at the University of North Carolina, stated:

Nothing is more remarkable, or more indicative of the intelligence and education of our people than the fact newspapers have been established in every town of importance which has been captured from the enemy. (In them) American journals have been busy in imparting information, in combating crime, in inculcating virtue, in fostering all the attributes of humanity in the bosoms of American soldiery, and in striving to extend over the benighted territory conquered by our arms, the ameliorating influence of our civilization.<sup>41</sup>

The Administration's paper, the Washington Union, stated, "The press is a necessary accompaniment of our armies. Wherever our armies have penetrated, and the press can find an abiding place in a convenient locality, a printing press makes its appearance. It has become the herald of information and the pioneer of civilization."<sup>42</sup> The New Orleans Delta said the American papers in Mexico gave our army an advantage over all others in history "by enabling them to be their own trumpeters." Since official military reports often did not do the soldiers justice, it was fortunate, the paper said, that "they carry about with them their Homers, Xenophones and Thucydides in the shape of some printers and editors, who, as soon as the fighting subsides, throw aside their muskets, and hunt up a few reams of paper."<sup>43</sup>

As the war continued the appearance of the American

newspapers on Mexican territory continued to expand. (Some of these publications are discussed in later chapters.) Responding to the need for news at home and news in the camps, they found small but sufficient markets for their publications wherever the American forces penetrated into Mexico. They also proved of use to the American military governments, printing orders and regulations pertaining to both the troops and the civilian population. Recognizing this latter function, many of the papers took pains to publish portions of their contents in Spanish, as well as English. Some, through the hard effort of their practical printer-owners, obtained permanency. But most, like the American occupation forces, were transient, and as the war wound down and the troops withdrew, the papers' role ended.

## NOTES

1. The best study of these newspapers is Lota M. Spell, "The Anglo-Saxon Press in Mexico, 1846-1848," American Historical Review, 38 (October 1932) 1:20-31. The present study does not attempt to duplicate Spell's pioneering work.
2. Connor and Faulk, op. cit., p. 186.
3. Spell, op. cit., p. 21. de Alba became chief justice of Nueces County, Texas, after the paper folded, and died at Corpus Christi in July, 1847 at age 45. New Orleans Delta, September 7, 1847.
4. Niles National Register, February 20, 1846.
5. For examples see New Orleans Delta, February 18, 1846; New Orleans Picayune, February 20, 1846.
6. Corpus Christi (Texas) Gazette February 12, 1846.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., March 19, 1846, quoted in New Orleans Delta, April 4, 1846.
9. Spell, op. cit., p. 21.
10. New Orleans Delta, March 15, 1846.
11. Charleston Courier, June 20, 1846. Also see Spell, op. cit., p.23. A fuller treatment of the interesting journalism career of Samuel Bangs is included in Lota M. Spell, Pioneer Printer: Samuel Bangs in Mexico and Texas (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1963).
12. Quoted in Niles National Register, June 27, 1846, pp. 262-3.
13. New Orleans Delta, June 14,16, 1846; New Orleans Picayune, June 14, 1846.
14. Ibid. McLeod, faced with a shortage of newsprint in the newly captured Mexican city, had a novel idea for overcoming the problem. In his first edition he appealed to the "patriotic people of New Orleans" to have a large number of his paper re-printed and shipped to him in Matamoros for distribution in northern Mexico. Quoted in Philadelphia North American, June 24, 1846.
15. Quoted in New Orleans Delta, June 14, 1846.

16. New Orleans Picayune, June 16, 1846.
17. Quoted in Philadelphia North American, June 24, 1846.
18. New Orleans Delta, June 14, 1846.
19. New York Sun, June 8, 1848.
20. Washington Union, June 22, 1846.
21. New Orleans Delta, June 24, 1846.
22. Ibid., July 7, 1846.
23. Ibid., June 16, 1846.
24. Quoted in New Orleans Delta, September 9, 1846.
25. New Orleans Picayune, October 21, 1848. At that time the Flag moved across the river to newly established Brownsville, Texas, and continued publication for another 10 years. Spell, "Anglo-Saxon...", op. cit., p. 30.
26. Ibid., p. 22.
27. American Flag, August 28, 1847. This issue is at the Wisconsin State Historical Society Library, Madison, Wisconsin.
28. New Orleans Picayune, January 3, 28, 1847.
29. Ibid., February 3, 1847.
30. New Orleans Delta, February 3, 1847.
31. Ibid., February 4, 1847.
32. Ibid., March 25, 1847.
33. American Flag, August 23, 1846, quoted in Charleston Courier, September 3, 1846.
34. See examples in New Orleans Picayune, June 6, 27, 1848.
35. Ibid., September 12, 1847.
36. New Orleans Crescent, August 8, 1848.
37. Spell, op. cit., p. 23.
38. Matamoros Reveille, June 24, 1846. This issue is in the Wisconsin State Historical Society Library, Madison, Wisconsin.

39. Ibid.
40. Spell, op. cit., p.23.
41. New Orleans Delta, October 13, 1847.
42. Washington Union, April 22, 1847.
43. New Orleans Delta, November 20, 1847.

## CHAPTER 8

### BATTLE OF MONTERREY

Monterrey was the first major battle of the war that American correspondents witnessed. It was also the first major battle that American troops ever fought off American soil, and when the news of the victory arrived it exploded with the force of a bombshell. "The victory at Monterrey is one of those brilliant achievements which will be cited in history as proof of the superior courage and ability of the Anglo Saxon race," the Philadelphia North American proclaimed, as it reported the tremendous enthusiasm in that city over the news. "Had such a victory been achieved by British arms," the North American continued, "It would have figured in the London Times as a deed of the most heroic character."<sup>1</sup> With a mixture of pride, jingoism and news sense, the country's papers spared little effort in publishing the details of what was, at least to the American point of view, "a deed of the most heroic character."<sup>2</sup>

In reality, the victory was a bloody one, marked by a number of command mistakes. But it was a victory. A combination of luck and fighting skill on the part of General Zachary Taylor's small, spirited army allowed it to overcome a larger Mexican force in the city of Monterrey during a four-day struggle,



September 20-24, 1846.<sup>3</sup> Lacking adequate transportation, Taylor's 6,000-man army had slowly, almost painfully, moved forward from Matamoros during August and September. Taylor had not expected a fight at Monterrey, but when he reached the city on September 19 he found it fortified, and a Mexican force of more than 10,000 waiting for him. The next day he split his forces into two groups: General William Jenkins Worth took the 2nd Division (2,200 men) to the west side of the city for the main attack while the 1st Division (Lieutenant Colonel John Garland substituting for the ill General David E. Twiggs) and General William O. Butler's 3rd Division of volunteers were to make a diversionary attack on the east side of the city. The two forces lost contact with each other, and the east flank attacked before Worth was in position on the west. During the next two days the east flank, directed by Taylor, suffered heavy losses and made little headway, while Worth was advancing house-to-house from the lightly defended west side. Surrounded, the Mexican forces yielded on the night of September 23. Taylor, aware of his heavy losses, then agreed to a controversial armistice which allowed the defenders seven days before retiring from the city. Additionally, both sides promised not to fight for at least eight weeks, unless their governments ordered otherwise.<sup>4</sup>

Kendall and Haile of the Picayune and Freamer of the Delta all were at Monterrey. Haile, in particular, mailed stories back at every step of the advance, but the slow, irregular deliveries hindered publication of them. As the time of

battle drew close it seemed as if Taylor's army had dropped from sight. "Where is General Taylor?," an editorial in the St. Louis Reveille asked at the beginning of October. Was it true, the paper wondered, that he was advancing on a fortified city undermanned and ill-equipped as the New Orleans papers suggested?<sup>5</sup>

The Delta wrote, "Great anxiety is now felt and expectation is on tip-toe to hear from the...army."<sup>6</sup> The Administration paper, the Washington Union, observed: "We are looking for news from the army with much more anxiety than they are looking for news from Washington."<sup>7</sup> The Picayune commented, "Where the suspense is so prolonged human curiosity will be at work and in devining what may have happened, it is not strange that conjectures have taken the form of positive rumors, and that reports have been circulated that can be traced to no authentic source."<sup>8</sup> The newspaper statements of anxiety became a pattern which preceded each major battle of the war. As a result, the suspense they helped to create heightened the public jubilation which followed the news of each victory.

During the months Taylor was preparing to move his troops forward, Kendall had been organizing a system to relay the Picayune's reports back to New Orleans. These preparations, which the editor made when not in the back country with McCulloch's scouts, provided the key for the paper's success in being first to report the results. In addition to his journalistic sense, Kendall had sound knowledge about express lines and horses. In Mexico, he once wrote, "Every man had to have a horse under him

on which 'you could run for your life' and save it."<sup>9</sup> With care and forethought, he applied this attitude to establishing his express system.

Throughout the summer Kendall's letters were widely reprinted, appearing regularly in papers in Charleston, St. Louis, Washington, Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York, Boston — even in Mexico City.<sup>10</sup> The Picayune said their appearance in Mexican newspapers "was a little unexpected by us," and added, "They do not fail to mention that he once visited their country under different auspices."<sup>11</sup> When the army started its slow movement forward, Kendall again joined the Texas scouts. Notifying the Picayune of Kendall's decision, another correspondent, wrote, "He can't sleep if anyone gets ahead of him, so he had to go along." If a unit came down the road headed for California, the writer added, "Kendall would join it."<sup>12</sup>

The army's main staging depot for the march to Monterrey was a small Rio Grande town called Camargo. Kendall described it as, "that hottest of all holes."<sup>13</sup> Haile of the Picayune wrote "had we been in the focus of a sun-glass, ten miles in diameter, it would not have been much worse." On one day in August, 1846, with the sun "darting down rays which were like arrows of fire... with not a tree to protect or a breath of air to relieve..." Haile daydreamed of cooler times in New Orleans. He recalled sitting "in an easy arm-chair, with my foot thrown lazily upon another, a white linen coat on — shirt-collar open — a delicious Havana between the lips, and — oh — that large, sweating

tumbler of iced mint julep sitting on the table!"<sup>14</sup>

Haile had arrived at Camargo on August 10, and immediately sought out Taylor to ask his plans. "Everything betokens an early movement of the troops on Monterey," Haile reported.<sup>15</sup> "It has always been my opinion," he wrote confidently, "that the Mexicans would give Gen. Taylor another chance to whip them, and on a large scale, at or near Monterey, and I find that most of the officers here agree."<sup>16</sup> Since Taylor had placed Camargo under martial law and ordered the army to bar all non-authorized personnel from the town, Haile asked for and received a written permit from the general which allowed him to remain with the army. In two weeks time, Haile observed, the camp which had stretched "12 tents wide and one mile long" grew to three miles.

"It is no child's play, this campaigning in Mexico," the Picayune reporter wrote, as the heat took a mounting toll on the untrained troops. To pass the time one night, Haile, an interested observer of Mexican customs, decided to attend a midnight wedding at a Camargo church. "Will they invite one to kiss the bride?" he wondered. "And if invited, ought a fellow to profit by the privilege? But we will see the bride before we decide these momentous questions." She turned out to be "tall, awkward and plain-looking," and Haile concluded, "Nobody, fortunately, was called on to kiss the bride."<sup>17</sup>

As the time drew near to leave for Monterrey, Haile notified the Picayune he was going to travel with the command of Brigadier General William Worth. He was sure Worth, who had

missed the opening battles of May 8-9, was "determined to do something brilliant at all hazards." Haile also noted he personally "was determined to see it out," although the march to "the interior of the enemy's country, almost unknown to us, causes everyone to reflect deeply."<sup>18</sup>

Assuring the Picayune "the best horse for a long journey in this country is a mule," Haile had purchased one for the trip to Monterrey. He had even practiced riding it around the camp for several days. "He is a sleek, grave looking old fellow, perfectly docile, and has a lively, easy gait," Haile explained. With a touch of whimsy, the reporter named the mule "Ampudia," after the Mexican general who Taylor had defeated in the war's opening battles. In his usual light manner Haile concluded, "I shall mount my faithful mule and make a forced march, in time to enter Monterey with the first and engage a choice room at one of their crack hotels."<sup>19</sup>

The march to Monterrey was slow, excessively hot and hard on the troops, who tried to make it easier on themselves by marching between 3 a.m. and 9 a.m. Haile traveled at night too. Stopping near the town of Mier en route to join Worth's division, Haile wrote to the Picayune at 1:30 a.m. by moonlight. He said he was travelling with only one other person. "We have reached thus far without having our throats cut," he wrote, "and hope to reach Cerralvo in safety though we go alone." He cut the letter short in order to give it to an army express messenger he had met on the road, writing, "I must close for a cloud is coming over

the moon."<sup>20</sup>

Concerned about travelling alone in guerrilla country, Haile overtook a small wagon train the next night, but found it included only three men and a small boy. Between them, he wrote, they had only three knives, and an unloaded rifle, but "nothing approached save gangs of wolves and a large, wild jackass."<sup>21</sup> Although the heat was "exceedingly oppressive," Haile continued to travel steadily forward on his mule towards the next main depot, Cerralvo. Along the road he encountered numerous volunteer units, and their stragglers, moving slowly in the heat, setting up small campsites everywhere. At night the small camps were dark and quiet, no talk allowed because of the guerrilla threat. "The whole camp was soon wrapped in silence," Haile wrote about one stop, "excepting here and there, where a tired soldier could be heard blowing off his fatigues and cares through his nasal organ." At one small town Haile joined a group of army officers at a fandango being held at a nearby ranch by moonlight. Sitting on a bench watching the dancers he observed:

The senoritas, many of whom were, by moonlight, very pretty, were dressed, with a few exceptions, in calico, after the American style.... In truth, the party resembled a country ball at home, the girls manifesting the same modest timidity so captivating in our sweet Creole girls, and the young men, who were neatly clad in white linen pants, snow white shirts and red silk sashes, conducting themselves with perfect politeness and regularity.<sup>22</sup>

Reaching Cerralvo on September 8, Haile was happy to report the weather was cooler and food and water were in abundant

supply in the area. "Cerralvo ought to be a perfect paradise," he stated admiringly, adding with the then characteristic attitude, "Nothing but an American population is wanting to make it one."<sup>23</sup> At Cerralvo Haile caught up with his Picayune colleague Kendall.

I hunted him down as soon as I arrived... but could not succeed in ascertaining his exact whereabouts until I happened to espy Spriggs, his favorite charger, standing near the door of a dwelling. I have never seen Spriggs and his doating master very far apart in Mexico, and knew very well that my search was at an end.<sup>24</sup>

Haile found Kendall in "robust" health. "He seems to be in his element while dashing around the country with the spy company," Haile wrote. To Haile, McCullough's Rangers were "all good men and true." On September 12 the Rangers were ordered forward again towards Monterrey on a scouting mission, and Kendall left with them.<sup>25</sup>

Haile, meanwhile, was on the road to Monterrey once more, riding along with a company of the 7th Infantry. The mood of the army was confident and light-hearted, he judged, also noting "the officers are busy today writing 'one more letter home'" and some were working on "last wills and testaments."<sup>26</sup> Whenever an army express rider started for the rear Haile would take the opportunity to send a letter to the Picayune, often tearing pages out of his notebook to send along. His letters covered a wide range of topics, from names and descriptions of the people he met daily, to the mood of the army, to extensive descriptions of the "higher and more majestic countryside" through which the army was passing.

(Exercising its editorial judgment, the Picayune usually omitted the countryside descriptions).<sup>27</sup> Although Haile made much better time than most of the marching soldiers, the trip between Camargo and Monterrey took him 15 days. Riding and camping could be exhausting, as Haile explained on September 17, the day before reaching Monterrey:

The dew had been so heavy during the night that, as we slept without tents, we found ourselves damp to the skin when reveille beat (at 4:30 a.m.) On rising from my blanket to stretch my limbs, my head came up in one of the eternal thorn bushes, leaving several points in the skin....To dress, gather your plunder, saddle your Caballo, pack a cross, cunning mule, and all this in the dark, is a job that requires much practice to render it pleasing....<sup>28</sup>

"Well, the ball has opened!" Haile wrote the next night, September 18, at midnight. For the first time he was able to use the dateline: "Camp before Monterey." The unit Haile was riding with had planned to camp about four miles from the Mexican city when the troops heard a "brisk cannonading in that direction." Rushing to the scene he learned the Mexicans had fired at Taylor and his staff when the general first arrived before the city. "The first ball came within about ten yards of the General," Haile recorded.<sup>29</sup>

The reporter quickly found a spot in the camp and began recording the atmosphere around him. "How do the troops act on the eve of an expected battle?," he asked.

Only that they are a little more precise in the performance of their duties — a little more careful in arranging their arms and knapsacks to be in readiness for an instant's



notice — and a little more careful to procure rest while they may — I see no change in their demeanor. The only conversation is, how they might go to work to take the city....It is the settled belief that the Mexicans will fight, and it is also believed that many lives will be sacrificed on both sides.<sup>30</sup>

The next day, September 19, was a day "of excitement and interest to our isolated little army," Haile reported. Most of the day was spent in scouting the Mexican defenses. Haile, who had spent the last part of the trip riding with Captain Miles, commander of the 7th Infantry, decided to stay with that unit, especially since it was moving with Worth's Second Division. Haile was quite impressed with Worth. "A handsomer officer than he appeared, I never saw," Haile wrote. "His handsome face was lighted up with a proud, but affable smile, as he motioned gracefully to his officers...the directions they were to take with their commands," Haile noted, using the gregarious ante-bellum writing style of the day. The mood of the troops, the reporter predicted, "renders this body of men invincible." As the troops lay around him sleeping on their rifles, Haile added, "No one expects an easy victory...all have made up their minds to see much bloodshed."<sup>31</sup>

Military express riders continued to leave the camp nightly to carry dispatches to the rear, and Haile continued to send his daily letters to the Picayune with them. After writing out a letter he would take the precaution of making notes of its contents in case he would have to rewrite the information later. At noon on September 20, Worth's troops broke camp to begin their

encircling movement to the west side of the city. McCullough's company was part of the division's reconnoitering party, Kendall moving with it. Haile, meanwhile, was with the 7th Infantry, further back in the division's ranks. In the confusion of the camp the two correspondents did not coordinate their plans.

"Kendall and I both came out with this division, neither knowing that the other was coming with it, until it was too late to return," Haile wrote when the battle was over. The double coverage with Worth's division, although accidental, led to over emphasis on the activities of that unit, while the First and Third Divisions on the east side of the city received much less coverage. Like all reporters, Haile and Kendall saw the story from their particular vantage points. Although Worth's division played a major role in the battle's outcome, the fighting at the east end of the city was more extensive and costly. More than 75% of the American casualties were suffered in that zone; and, correspondingly, the troops did not perform as well there.

Haile kept extensive notes of what he witnessed with Worth's troops, and when he finally was able to sit down four days later to begin his letters to the Picayune, concentrated on those incidents. With the pressure on him to send the messages with the first express riders to leave, he had time only for a short summary of the events on Taylor's front.<sup>32</sup> The first news reports out, primarily Haile's concentrated on Worth's achievements and those of the Louisiana Volunteer Company, which, of course, was a strong local angle for the New Orleans press. Haile

and Kendall both realized this deficiency, and spent a number of days collecting anecdotes and interviews of activities at the east end of the city. But the followup report did not reach New Orleans until two-and-a-half weeks later, long after it was established in the public mind that Worth's Division had carried the day. Taylor's role did not suffer in the unbalanced coverage, since he was the victorious army's acknowledged commander; in fact, Taylor may have benefitted from it. Some historians have subsequently charged Taylor mishandled the troops on the east front, causing higher casualties, and more intensive reporting there might have recorded that.

On the morning of September 21, Haile, still advancing with the 7th Infantry, watched as a charge by a body of Mexican cavalry opened the battle. The attack was quickly broken, Haile recording:

About thirty of the enemy were killed in this skirmish, and among them a Captain, who, with two or three others, fell in the road. The Captain was wounded in three places, the last shot hitting him on the forehead. He fought gallantly to the last, and I am sorry that I cannot learn his name.<sup>33</sup>

It was one of the few names Haile missed, for his report of the fighting over the next two days is filled with names of soldiers of all ranks, particularly those killed or wounded.

The Americans started advancing cautiously again, Worth ordering four companies, including the 7th Infantry, to halt along a fence. The unit remained there for more than two hours, Haile reported, while a Mexican gun continued to fire at it.

"The balls fell directly in their midst all this time without wounding a man!" Haile noted, somewhat astonished, because he felt "the Mexicans manage their artillery in battery as well as the Americans do."<sup>34</sup>

Worth next ordered his troops to take Independence Hill, which was providing the Mexicans with a commanding position over the battlefield. To Haile the enemy's position appeared to be "in the clouds," so steep was the hill. The troops, including the 7th Infantry and the Louisiana Volunteers, charged up the hill in a "shower of grape and round shot" — cheering and firing as they ran. "Such a foot race as now ensued has seldom every been seen," Haile said, describing how the various units competed against each other in an attempt to be first into the Mexicans' position. The next morning the correspondent watched as the troops charged and captured the Bishop's Palace.<sup>35</sup> One of the soldiers Haile watched in the charge was S.D. Allis, a former Picayune office boy. A number of officers considered Allis a hero in the affair, Haile said. "He would rise and open up — up — like a jack-knife, until he obtained his full altitude, and would then level his piece, take good aim, fire, and fold up again behind a rock or bush," Haile explained.<sup>36</sup>

During the battle Haile, joined Worth's small staff group as a volunteer aide. While it gave him a better view of the events, it also reinforced the strong feelings he had for the general. When the battle was over, Haile wrote:

The achievement is a glorious one — sufficiently to satisfy the ambition of any man on earth. I was expecting to see Gen. Worth rushing his men into unnecessary danger in order to win for them and himself great military fame, but his conduct has been very different from this. His great study has been in gaining these commanding points with the least possible sacrifice of life.<sup>37</sup>

The battle continued for forty-eight hours, the troops, and Haile and Kendall, having only raw corn to eat during that time. On September 23 Worth's forces broke into the city from the west side, and the battle was fought, Haile reported, "step by step, house by house."<sup>38</sup>

Kendall, meanwhile, was with the Texas Rangers who were acting as Worth's scouts. At one point during the first-day fighting the Picayune editor volunteered to find and warn the general when it appeared a large body of Mexican cavalry was about to charge the Texans.<sup>39</sup> The attack failed to develop, however, and after spending the day at the front of the advance with McCullough's Texans, often under fire, Kendall slept with them that night in some nearby huts.<sup>40</sup>

The next morning, September 22, McCulloch's unit did sustain a charge from the lancers, and Kendall and the rest of the troop had to fight back while still in the saddle, "pouring in a perfect storm of lead from...rifles, double-barreled guns and pistols."<sup>41</sup> The lancers attack was broken, but many of them still charged forward on foot, and a hand-to-hand struggle followed. Walking around the area afterward Kendall counted 150 Mexican casualties.<sup>42</sup> That afternoon Worth decided to attack

Federation Hill, a Mexican strongpoint protecting the western approach. Kendall again took part with the Texas company as it charged up the hill with other American units and dislodged the defenders at the top. (Haile also observed this attack.)<sup>43</sup>

In the afternoon Kendall watched as the Americans turned captured Mexican cannon on the Bishop's Palace, another strong point. He wrote:

...perhaps the history of war affords few instances so full of grandeur and sublimity as this. Every discharge of cannon seemed to have its thousand echoes in the otherwise huge mountains of the Sierra Madre, the reverberations would crash and re-echo across the valley...the reports would follow each other in such rapid succession that it seemed as though a thousand cannon were engaging in man's destruction instead of a half dozen so vigorously plied.<sup>44</sup>

On the final day of heavy fighting, September 23, Kendall served as a messenger for Worth as the troops on the western line advanced from house-to-house through the narrow streets of Monterrey. Because they were narrow, the streets were easily defended by well placed guns. This forced the Americans to move forward through the houses by knocking holes in wall after wall. On several occasions Kendall dashed down the narrow, dangerous streets with orders for the forward-most troops.<sup>45</sup> By the end of the day the relentless advance had hemmed in the Mexican troops and thousands of civilians, and the defenders brought out a white flag. Both armies halted, exhausted.<sup>46</sup>

Kendall was exhausted as well. Having participated so much in the fighting, he was in no position to write long reports

when the action ended. On the night of September 29 he sent an explanation to the Picayune: "I should have written to you before this late hour, but I knew all the while that our regular correspondent [Haile] was keeping you well acquainted with the stirring events of this past week, and little time had I, even could I have put my hands upon writing materials...."<sup>47</sup> Instead, Kendall concentrated on getting the express rider ready to carry Haile's detailed letters back to the paper. The courier took eight days to cover the distance to New Orleans, keeping pace with the official government messengers. The news of the battle reached the papers on the night of October 3, and while they all rushed out extras using scanty details from the ship officers, the Picayune soon was on the streets with Haile's complete story (eight letters) filling six columns. The street in front of the paper became jammed with people seeking copies, the Picayune "despairing" it could not satisfy the demand although its press was "throwing off between five and six thousand sheets an hour."<sup>48</sup>

The express riders left for the North as soon as the copies of the Picayune extra were available. As the news moved along, the Charleston Courier observed, "It is spreading rapidly throughout the country...as the newspapers, in a daily increasing circle, (are) teeming with it."<sup>49</sup> It reached Charleston October 10, Washington the night of October 11, and the Baltimore, Philadelphia and New York papers on October 12.

When the fighting ended Kendall had written, "Operating at different places at the same time, it is impossible to get

hold of everything (about the army) in a day."<sup>50</sup> It was at this point that the Picayune editor began assembling a detailed "history" of the struggle, including details on Taylor's eastern line. The report, filling more than three full pages of the paper, appeared in an extra edition on November 19, six weeks after the first news had arrived. To that point most of the Picayune's reports, and therefore much of the nation's coverage, had been from Haile.<sup>51</sup>

Although Taylor's generous truce terms proved controversial back home, Haile was satisfied with the agreement. American casualties were about 500, he reported, adding, "A considerable number of the wounded will die, so that the number who have lost their lives will be about 300." He continued, "The large fort at the north end of town is a very strong work and would have cost a heavy sacrifice of life to have taken it.... And moreover, it would have cost many a valuable life to have taken the city at the point of a bayonet."<sup>52</sup> Interestingly, Haile was impressed by the defeated Mexican units as they marched out of the city after the surrender:

And now was presented a scene I could never forget...infantry led off, with colors flying, drums beating, and trumpeters blowing with all their might. The fifers made all the noise they could.

"Most of the soldiers looked sullen, and their eyes gleamed with hatred and a desire for revenge," he wrote while watching the colorful units and their camp followers file by.<sup>53</sup>

Haile finally had time on September 24, the day after the



fighting ended, to start writing his battle story. He datelined the story "Bishop's Palace, Monterey," explaining:

Even now, though I write in a palace, I am obliged to hold the sheet of paper in one hand on my knee, for want of a desk. But I have no time for extra remarks — a chance offers to send you the news, and I must hurry to give you a glance at what has been done here, before the express goes off.<sup>54</sup>

With the first dispatches under way to the Picayune, Haile continued his followup work on the story. He started to compile a highly detailed unit by unit casualty report of all the American killed and wounded, including a description of the wounds. It was an ambitious project. Two weeks later he said, "Even now all of the names have not been gathered, the Kentucky regiment not having sent in any and some other corps having failed to report the names for several days of the fight. Haile persisted with it, however. "My object in collecting these names will be appreciated by the friends of the brave men who have fallen, as well as those who will be relieved from anxiety from reading over the lists," he stated. The report appeared in the Picayune on November 3, and filled four columns of agate type. Haile's list was within 10 of the official government report. It had to be a tedious chore to compile; the American casualties were high in comparison to the size of the force and historians have complained Taylor did not report all of the casualties.<sup>55</sup> In addition to the casualty report, Haile also compiled a detailed report of the captured Mexican arms and rode over the battle ground at the east end of the city with various army officers who

had fought in that area to reconstruct the portion of the story he and Kendall had not seen. He wrote:

I only regret that it is impossible, in one article, to furnish the public with (all) those details....This can only be done in the form of sketches, and in that manner I propose to present to your readers the particulars..., as fast as you will find room to publish them.<sup>56</sup>

The detailed summary that followed, filling almost two galleys of type, ran in the Picayune November 4, a month after the first stories of Haile and Kendall which had detailed the events at the west end of the city. Haile concluded:

I fear that you will find my communication too long, but you will readily see that I could not have given it in a much more condensed form. I have done my best, under the circumstances, and shall always hold myself in readiness to make corrections when any errors in this paper shall be pointed out to me.<sup>57</sup>

In addition to the fuller reports from Kendall and Haile, the Picayune also had access to letters written by Allis, the paper's former office worker who was serving in the Louisiana Volunteer Company. He had a vivid, first-person account of the Louisiana volunteers in the battle, including the charge up Independence Hill:

We had hardly reached the foot of the hill when down came a shower of grape and canister in our midst, but it appeared as if Mexican iron and copper was not made to kill Yankees. On we went through the shower of musket balls, and soon had climbed the mountain high enough to reach them with our musket balls. On we went, loading and forming as we advanced, until within fifty yards, when we rushed up as fast as our legs would carry us, driving the Mexicans down the other side....<sup>58</sup>

Allis also saw Haile during the fight. "He was riding about quite indifferent to the balls which fell around him," Allis reported, observing, "Although he did not run into danger, he did not appear to try to avoid it when it visited him."<sup>59</sup>

By the middle of October life had returned to normal at Monterrey. "Everything is as dull here as possible," Haile wrote from the army's encampment. He was particularly upset that the Mexicans had captured two American mail shipments en route to Monterrey. He had not heard from his family for more than six weeks. It would not have happened, Haile charged, "if the economical quartermaster at Camargo had not hired a Mexican to run the gauntlet for fifteen dollars." The correspondent admitted "no American citizen could be hired to take the mail through alone for \$100," but he felt an army escort could have made the delivery.<sup>60</sup> Additionally, Taylor was not making any statements on his plans. "The Washington letter writers probably know more about it than a majority of the officers under Gen. Taylor at the moment," Haile wrote. "Is the war ended?," he asked. "Knowing nothing of what is passing at home we can only judge by what we see and hear around us." Most officers, he explained, were convinced the war had only begun.<sup>61</sup>

In addition to having no news to report, Haile also came down with "double dysentary." "The health of the army is bad," he wrote, noting "a very heavy proportion" of the army was on the sick list. "As for the curiosities — the scenery — the habits of this singular people, and many rich scenes I have come across

here, my notes will enable me to pen descriptions of them for your readers when in health and at leisure," he assured the Picayune.<sup>62</sup>

Since no fighting was imminent, Haile decided to return home. He checked with Taylor, who assured him there would be no advance until reinforcements arrived. As he departed, Haile analyzed the military situation: "It is useless to conciliate — this has been demonstrated....We must whip them into a family union before we can negotiate with them. They must be compelled to become either Mexicans or Americans, and those who choose to preserve their nationality must...organize a government that shall be responsible."<sup>63</sup> He left Monterrey October 24, anxious to make the trip to New Orleans as fast as possible. The continuing threat of the guerrillas, however, slowed the trip. At the town of Reynosa, on November 1, he finally saw his original battle report to the Picayune:

It was copied into the N.Y. Herald, but as there was only one copy of it in the place, and as we had not time to read it and could not borrow it, I am yet unable to learn what you and the people generally at home think about it.<sup>64</sup>

Haile's long trip, which had started back in mid-May, ended the night of November 13 at Hewlett's Hotel in New Orleans, as he jauntily signed the register: "C.M. Haile, Monterey."<sup>65</sup>

Haile's extensive reporting was widely praised, and the other New Orleans dailies paid him the compliment of reprinting his work. The Picayune was delighted with his coverage. "We cannot withhold the expression of our admiration of the letters

of Mr. Haile. They possess the best qualities of such a correspondence — unpretending simplicity of detail and studious accuracy. He is ever most solictious to correct the slightest error into which he may have been led. His state of narration rises with his subject as will allow all who read the letters...."<sup>66</sup> The Charleston Courier commented admiringly about the Picayune's scoop: "To the Picayune is due the credit of getting the news through...Their correspondent [Haile] writes graphically and spares no trouble in collecting his materials."<sup>67</sup> "We have read (Haile's letters) with such interest," the Baltimore Sun explained, "that notwithstanding our crowded columns we cannot refrain from laying them before our readers...."<sup>68</sup> Haile's letters even were used in full by the Administration paper, the Washington Union, but not without a degree of restraint. Under a one-column headline reading simply, "Very Interesting News from Gen. Taylor's Camp," Haile's letters filled six columns on the paper's second page. The Union cautioned, however, "Of course we cannot vouch for the entire accuracy of these statements."<sup>69</sup> The next day, however, the Union obtained and printed copies of Taylor's first official battle reports from Polk and pointed out "they confirm last night's...accounts," referring to the Picayune's report.<sup>70</sup>

Haile's innovation of compiling the detailed casualty list also touched off praise, and a controversy. The St. Louis Reveille called his list "the most elaborate and complete documents of the kind that we have ever seen."<sup>71</sup> The Baltimore Sun

had strong praise for the report. "The press has by its enterprise, easily beaten the government casualty reports," the Sun stated, adding, "The public demand upon the celerity of the modern press is too exacting to admit of the delay necessary for that accuracy required in the official details of the battle."<sup>72</sup>

The New Orleans reporters continued to compile these lists after all of the major battles. Their accuracy got to the point that in November, 1847, when the government issued an official list of the killed and wounded at Mexico City, the Charleston Courier commented, "It appears less accurate than that of the New Orleans correspondents...we therefore deem it unnecessary to publish it."<sup>73</sup> At one point the War Department complained about the newspapers compiling the lists, claiming it was making its job more difficult. But this was greeted with strong opposition from the press. A number of newspapers had argued from the start that the government should make the casualty lists available to the press immediately. The National Intelligencer urged "on the score of humanity" that the lists of "privates as well as officers" be made known.<sup>74</sup> The Philadelphia North American made an even stronger argument. It stated: "Wars are always popular at a distance. The bulletin that announces the destruction of a thousand fellow beings is received with...pride, pomp and circumstance of glorious war." In the public's celebrations of victories in Mexico, the newspaper said, "The main features of the terrible truth are suppressed....We should like to have a list of all (casualties) with the details and names.

Let our people realize the price paid for conquered provinces and military glories."<sup>75</sup> The government's complaint died a quiet death, and the papers compiled and published the lists throughout the conflict.

Where Haile and Kendall had succeeded at Monterrey, Freaner failed. Although it waited hopefully, the Delta did not receive a letter from him regarding the battle until early November. When his correspondence finally came through, the Delta stated he had written letters twice a week since the city fell, but "we have not received one of them..." The paper claimed there was a "system of espionage at the camp" which intercepted letters without "a certain admixture of soft soap for certain parties."<sup>76</sup> The earliest published letter from "Mustang" at Monterrey was dated October 13. By that time he had switched to discussing the resumption of normal camp life.<sup>77</sup>

The lost letters prevent establishing Freaner's exact role in the battle, but the Delta later reported he had participated in the fighting as a member of Colonel Jack Hays' Texas Ranger company.<sup>78</sup> His letters had been coming regularly to the paper in the weeks before the battle. When the Louisiana volunteers were mustered out in August after their three-month tour ended Freaner stayed at Matamoros and joined Hays' unit. Whereas it had been "in a quandry" when Freaner and the other staff members left with the volunteers in May, the Delta was now praising him for his "indefatigable efforts" to obtain army news.<sup>79</sup> When Hays' company was sent on a scouting mission to protect the south

flank of Taylor's army as it advanced towards Monterrey, Freaner wrote, "We are now in the very heart of the enemy's country."

The scouts had only dried beef to eat for the final four days of a 14-day ride, he noted, in an experience similar to Kendall's.<sup>80</sup>

Hays' company continued to scout in the forward areas until Taylor reached Monterrey. At that point the general assigned it to Worth's division when he made his flanking movement to the west.<sup>81</sup> It is most likely, then, that Freaner fought and observed the action on the same line as Kendall and Haile. A year after the battle the Delta stated: "At the battle of Monterey, where, it's said, he killed in single combat an officer of the Lancers and captured his Mexican horse, (Freaner) gained the familiar cognomen of 'Mustang' over which signature he has since been a regular correspondent of the Delta."<sup>82</sup> While the paper might have been right about the incident, it was wrong about the pseudonym; Freaner had been signing his letters with "Mustang" since June 3, 1846.<sup>83</sup> After the excitement of the battle passed, Freaner's life in camp once again became routine. "We are now with hardly news enough to afford usual conversation — even 'camp rumors' are scarce," Freaner wrote.<sup>84</sup> He remained at Monterrey until late November before returning to New Orleans.<sup>85</sup>

John N. Peoples of the Delta later charged that the Picayune's accidental "double coverage" of Worth's division caused a "great" public misconception regarding the battle. He wrote:



From the tone of the newspapers throughout the United States, a person unacquainted with the important events of (Twiggs' division) would look upon it as being of minor consideration. This is the greatest error that ever was committed, and owes its origin altogether to accident.<sup>86</sup>

Peoples did not criticize the reporting of Kendall and Haile; in fact he felt they "fulfilled their task very well." The problem, he stated, was that no one accompanied the troops at the east end of the city to provide the same record the Picayune reporters had of Worth's troops at the west end. Further, Peoples noted, when the Picayune's "voluminous and interesting" reports were copied by newspapers around the country, some distortion was inserted into the original copy. "Generals Taylor, Twiggs, Butler, Quitman, etc. were forgotten and paragraphs crept into the original account derogatory to the character and standing of those gentlemen as officers and soldiers," Peoples wrote five months after the battle. In the absence of all official accounts of the battles, Peoples said, the American public accepted the newspaper accounts that "Worth was the hero" and that "he did all the work."<sup>87</sup>

There had been a great deal of confusion and unhappiness in Washington, D.C., too, the Charleston Courier noted, but not because of the quality of the reporting. The problem, according to the Courier's Washington correspondent, was the long wait between reports from the correspondents. Although the first stories by Haile and Kendall had reached the capital in 17 days after the fighting, it was five more weeks before the second reports

arrived. Since there was not a complete official report from Taylor during that time, the government was as dependent on the reporters as the rest of the nation. Thus its unhappiness.

The battle of Monterrey clearly established the Picayune's leadership in reporting the events of the Mexican War. Relying on Kendall's organizational skills, and Haile's ability to understand and write about military affairs, the paper re-inforced its reputation of being first and best informed on Mexican affairs. Kendall's forethought in establishing the relay system to carry the news back to the paper proved a critical factor at Monterrey. It was the first battle to be reported by the regular correspondents, and, in fact, probably the first instance of foreign war correspondence by American writers. Haile, in particular, rose to the challenge by providing a day-to-day account of the action. He followed up by getting it into written form ready for the express rider as soon as possible. The success of his effort is clearly reflected in the reaction of the country's newspapers to it. Although some historians have cited Kendall as the first of the American war correspondents, Haile, on the basis of his performance at Monterrey, provides, at the least, a technical challenge to Kendall's right to the title. Before the war came to an end, however, Kendall had many more opportunities to prove his reporting abilities, and proved equal to the task.

## NOTES

1. Philadelphia North American, October 15, 1847.
2. For examples of such Monterrey coverage see Washington Union, October 11, 1846; Baltimore Sun, New York Sun, Philadelphia North American, all October 12, 1846.
3. For details of the battle see David Lavender, Climax at Buena Vista (Philadelphia & New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1966) Chap. 6; Smith, op. cit., Chap. 12. Monterrey is spelled with one r in this example according to the common American usage at the time. It should be noted, however, Monterrey, Mexico is correctly spelled with two rs, and will be used in the text of the present study with two rs, unless it involves a direct quote from the reporters' letters during the war. Monterey, California, also referred to in these pages, is correctly spelled with one r.
4. Lavender, op. cit., p. 120. President Polk, dismayed at Taylor's generosity, ordered the armistice ended, but by then it was too late.
5. St. Louis Reveille, October 3, 1846.
6. New Orleans Delta, September 26, 1846.
7. Washington Union, September 14, 1846.
8. New Orleans Picayune, October 18, 1846.
9. George Wilkins Kendall, Letters from...., op. cit., p.102.
10. For an example of Kendall's letters as used by other newspapers during 1846 see Baltimore Sun, July 7,28; August 9,14,19, 21,29; September 5,22; October 3; November 10.
11. Quoted in St. Louis Reveille, November 4, 1846. The reference was to Kendall's imprisonment in Mexico City.
12. New Orleans Picayune, August 15, 1846.
13. Kendall, Letters From...., op. cit., p.111.
14. New Orleans Picayune, September 12, 1846.
15. Ibid., August 25, 1846.
16. Ibid., August 26, 1846.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid., September 6, 1846.

19. Ibid.
20. Ibid., September 22, 1846.
21. Ibid., October 6, 1846.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Copeland, Kendall of the Picayune, op. cit., p.168.
26. Picayune, October 6, 1846.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid., October 4, 1846.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid., October 22, 1846.
37. Ibid., October 4, 1846.
38. Ibid.
39. Copeland, op. cit., p.172.
40. Ibid.
41. Kendall quoted in Ibid., p.173.
42. New Orleans Picayune, November 19, 1846.
43. Ibid., October 3, 1846.
44. Ibid., November 19, 1846.

45. Copeland, op. cit., pp. 176-7.
46. Lavender, op. cit., pp. 118-120.
47. New Orleans Picayune, October 21, 1846.
48. Ibid., October 4, 6, 1846.
49. Charleston Courier, October 10, 1846.
50. New Orleans Picayune, October 21, 1846.
51. Haile's coverage of the battle appeared in the Picayune on October 4 and November 3 and 4, 1846. Several Kendall letters, primarily on October 21, 1846, appeared during this time, but did not get into detailed accounts of the battle.
52. Picayune, October 21, 1846.
53. Ibid.
54. Ibid., October 4, 1846.
55. Smith, op. cit., I:505-6.
56. Picayune, November 11, 1846.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid., November 3, 1846.
59. Ibid.
60. Ibid., November 3, 1846.
61. Ibid.
62. Ibid., November 14, 1846.
63. Ibid.
64. Ibid.
65. Ibid.
66. Ibid., October 6, 1847. From the tone of the Picayune's comments it appears brevity and accuracy had become important to editors even in the 1840s.
67. Charleston Courier, October 10, 1846.

68. Baltimore Sun, October 13, 1846. Additional praise for Haile's reporting can be found in the Picayune, November 19, 1846; Philadelphia North American, December 8, 1846; St. Louis Reveille, October 15, 1846, April 20, 1847.
69. Washington Union, October 11, 1846.
70. Ibid., October 12, 1846.
71. St. Louis Reveille, November 13, 1846.
72. Baltimore Sun, November 13, 1846.
73. Charleston Courier, November 22, 1847.
74. National Intelligencer quoted in Philadelphia North American, November 11, 1846.
75. Ibid.
76. New Orleans Delta, November 6, 1847.
77. Ibid., November 3, 1846.
78. Ibid., November 6, 1847.
79. Ibid., May 13, August 15, 1846.
80. Ibid., September 6, 1846.
81. Copeland, op. cit., p.171.
82. New Orleans Delta, November 6, 1847.
83. See Ibid., June 16, 1846.
84. Ibid., November 17, 1846.
85. Ibid., December 15, 1846. Twiggs' 1st division was on the east flank.
86. Ibid., March 2, 1847.
87. Ibid.

## CHAPTER 9

### THE LULL AT TAMPICO

By the start of 1847 it became evident the war was going to continue longer than many editors had assumed. "The first and grand mistake (in our war effort)," the St. Louis Reveille explained, "arose from the very natural contempt we felt for the enemy, and in this mistake the whole country shared."<sup>1</sup> The Polk Administration had decided an expanded war would have to be waged, and had selected General Winfield Scott to head a new, major assault inland from Vera Cruz to Mexico City. Forces to bolster Scott's invasion army were taken from Taylor, who was to hold his position at Monterrey in the north. It was an ambitious plan, involving the first American amphibious landing, and it took long preparation by the army and navy. As a result, events centered at the Gulf of Mexico port city of Tampico, Mexico during Winter, 1846-47, while the military carried out its buildup.<sup>2</sup>

It was during this period that another major correspondent in the war, John N. Peoples, emerged. Peoples, formerly a printer at the New Orleans Delta, was active for almost the entire two-year war period, establishing a number of American papers in the occupied territory and continuing a steady stream

of correspondence to the States. The New Orleans Crescent called him "the person, who without any other motive than a desire of spreading truth before the public, has been so indefatigable in furnishing his contemporaries in the United States everything of interest and importance."<sup>3</sup> The Delta and the Picayune agreed he was one of the most "indefatigable" of the correspondents -- a term of high praise at the time.<sup>4</sup> Describing his performance, the Picayune observed Peoples had persisted in his labor throughout the war period only for "peace and the improvement of his country."<sup>5</sup>

While at Matamoros in Summer, 1846, working as co-editor of the American Flag, Peoples started corresponding on a regular basis with the Delta. He had worked for that paper prior to joining the Louisiana volunteers in the first exuberant days of the war. His letters to the Delta, and later to the New Orleans Crescent, together with his penchant for establishing "war papers," made him one of the most influential journalists of the war. Young, outspoken and a firm believer in America's destiny, Peoples followed the army from Matamoros to Monterrey, to Tampico, to Vera Cruz and on to Jalapa, Puebla and finally Mexico City, constantly reporting about and praising its activities. After working with Fleeson on the Flag, Peoples went on to help establish new American papers at Tampico, Vera Cruz, Jalapa, Puebla and Mexico City. His paper at Mexico City, the American Star, became the most important of all the war papers, serving as the semi-official publication of the American army during its



eight-month occupation of the Mexican capital.<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile, his pseudonym "Chaparral" became known nationally through the widespread reprinting of his graphic letters to the Delta and Crescent.<sup>7</sup> In one of his earliest letters from Matamoros, Peoples gave a sample of the insightful, colorful and occasionally chauvinistic style that characterized his writing:

I think there must have been two hundred Americans outside the (Catholic) church and in the aisles, a great majority of whom were attracted there solely with the view of gazing at and admiring the Senoritas....I don't care what is said to the contrary, some of the Mexican women are very pretty, and although the men are still very hostile, they are becoming every day more Americanized.<sup>8</sup>

Next he had an anecdote about American General David E. Twiggs, who had temporarily been military commander in Matamoros:

A short time after the occupation of Matamoros by our troops, the old General was standing on the Plaza one day, and seeing a number of volunteers promenading with a score of Senoritas, he turned to (a lieutenant) and said, "I wouldn't like to storm this place twenty years hence." "Why so?" said the lieutenant. "Because I should have to fight a different breed of dogs."<sup>9</sup>

Blended with such anecdotes were numerous items regarding the movements, condition and activities of the army and its personnel. The reports were often long, highly detailed and descriptive, but they also included shorter news items such as these:

Col. Lewis P. Cook left yesterday for Monterrey...with goods. He is accompanied by about twenty men. The Mexicans bear the Colonel no great good will, and I should not be surprised if he got into trouble.

. . . . .

A duel was fought here yesterday evening between Dan Murphy and John Kinsey. The weapons, pistols at ten paces. At the second fire Dan was shot through the belly.<sup>10</sup>

In November, 1846, Peoples ended his relationship with Fleeson at the Matamoros paper, and traveled to Monterrey. As his wagon approached the American camp outside the city, Peoples later recalled, "the soldiers in great numbers left their ball playing and other amusements and ran...crying out to us, 'have you got a mail?' — 'what's the news from the States?'" Exhausted and fatigued by the long trip by boat and wagon, Peoples first found a room in a boarding house, a pattern followed by most of the correspondents who were not members of the army.<sup>11</sup> Later he toured the battlefields at the north and south ends of the city, where Worth's and Taylor's forces had fought. He was impressed with the strength of the Mexicans' defensive positions, concluding:

As much prepared as I was to see a well fortified place, I had no conception of its real strength, nor can it be conveyed to you in a letter. To know what Monterrey is, you must see it; and when that is done you will say with me, "How in the name of Heaven was it ever taken?"<sup>12</sup>

In addition to the visit to the battlefields, Peoples also interviewed American prisoners who had been released by Santa Anna, telling details of their capture and treatment in the Mexican camp. The interviews provided information about the condition of Santa Anna's army and its fears about Taylor. "So terrible has the name of Gen. Taylor become," reported one former

prisoner, "that the Mexican people believe he can travel 100 miles (in the desert) without water." Peoples also provided information on the location and size of the units under Worth, Wool and Taylor. He added it was "general knowledge" in the camp that the Americans would soon march to Victoria, 202 miles to the southeast. He also gave the names of the units and the route to be followed. "From this you may infer that headquarters will be at or near Tampico," he added.<sup>13</sup>

Taylor and his units departed for Victoria on December 14, 1846, and Peoples joined them, marching with the volunteers. But after traveling 65 miles, Taylor received an urgent message, requesting him to return the army to Monterrey immediately. Confusion followed, as the forced return march started at 4 a.m., Peoples related, with almost everyone "ignorant" of what was occurring. The army, its supplies and animals soon stretched 25 miles on foot, and Peoples arrived back at his former boarding house exhausted. He spent a day resting and writing letters to the Delta, intending to start the next day to find Taylor's new position.<sup>14</sup>

The alarm about a possible Mexican attack proved false, however, and within three days the troops were on the road to Victoria again. The pace proved grueling for the volunteers, who had to walk 25 to 30 miles a day over rough, rock-covered, rutted roads. Peoples complained mildly of the early morning starts:

As early as it was, the 'greasers were about the camp with their little articles of merchandise (sic) and followed the army for miles, until

all they had were disposed of. These people make money out of us every way....when they are not engaged in disposing of their wares, they will ferry sick soldiers over the rivers, by placing them on their own horses, and then jumping up behind them... (some) are making (to them) a fortune by the business, charging for each person thus ferried a picayune [6 1/4 cents].<sup>15</sup>

Peoples spent Christmas Eve, 1846, listening to the soldiers exchange stories about how they spent the holiday at home. Later the men grew silent and "everyone was left to his own reflection," the reporter observed. "I can't say that mine were of a very serious nature," he confided. "I must confess that those large bowls of egg-nog that annually sit upon the counter at Hewlett's (in New Orleans) were continually flitting before my eyes." On Christmas Day the army covered 25 miles. "The march was too heavy for men under any circumstances," Peoples felt, stating that dead horses were strewn along the road and that the "company called the 'laggers' had swelled to a regiment."<sup>16</sup> It was particularly dangerous for troops to fall behind the main column, and several were killed daily by the Mexican guerrillas who followed on the fringes. The 12-day, 202-mile march ended at Victoria on the morning of January 4. "Now that we are all here, what is to be done?," asked Peoples, as he described the bemusement of the officers and men camped around him.<sup>17</sup>

Meanwhile, another New Orleans correspondent headed for Tampico was Kendall's partner, F.A. Lumsden. Lumsden had missed the action at Monterrey, but was determined to witness the

assault at Vera Cruz. In December, Lumsden traveled from Matamoros to Tampico by way of Brazos Santiago, an island off the Texas coast used as a port by the Navy. On December 13, he witnessed the steamer Gopher hit a sand bar and sink with all its military cargo, including "14 barrels of pickels." He wrote, "If Uncle Sam was a rich man this would be a pretty place to 'break' him. The beach and bar are strewn with wrecks in all directions."<sup>18</sup> As he was waiting at Brazos Santiago for a boat to carry him to Tampico, Lumsden wrote "a very comfortable hotel" called "The Greenwood Saloon" had been opened there since his last visit. "But for this the island would be intolerable," he remarked.<sup>19</sup> Lumsden traveled to Tampico aboard the steamer Cincinnati with Brigadier General James Shields and his staff and arrived in time to enjoy egg nogs on Christmas Day. "(Tampico) is being Americanized very rapidly," he reported to the Picayune.<sup>20</sup>

Although Lumsden had gone to Tampico to join Scott's forces and the expected assault on Vera Cruz, he returned to New Orleans "unexpectedly...on a short errand," the Picayune explained. It also assured its readers, he left "a competent correspondent for this paper during his short absence." Lumsden took time during his short visit to promote the American "improvements" at Tampico: "There is no fighting, dissipation, rowdyism or disturbance of any kind, and it is not probable that the people of Tampico — the former inhabitants — ever saw so still and peaceable a place before."<sup>21</sup> Lumsden returned to Tampico in mid-February and again made arrangements to accompany General Shields

on the Vera Cruz assault. Confident it would be an easy victory, he asked his readers, "Who doubts the issue?"<sup>22</sup>

Lumsden's writing was the most jingoistic of the American reporters. He frequently overstated the strength and performance of the American forces, and his main purpose in moving with the army was to participate in the fighting, rather than report it. However, with his outlet on the pages of the Picayune, with its reputation for superior war coverage, his work was widely reprinted. As a result, the impact of his observations and reporting, although biased, cannot be overlooked.

Meanwhile, Taylor was still camped at Victoria, 100 miles to the west of Tampico, with his army of about 3,500 men. Peoples was the only reporter with Taylor's forces at the time, and his accounts of the march and encampment received wide use in the States. Although Victoria was in a remote interior region, Peoples' letters reached New Orleans in about three weeks since he was allowed to send them with the army's special express service operated by the quartermaster's unit. This allowed him to avoid using the regular mail service, which operated by way of Monterrey and took six to eight weeks to reach New Orleans.<sup>23</sup>

Life in the temporary camp was quiet, except for the numerous rumors as to where the troops were headed. One day Peoples was visiting with the Illinois volunteers when General Taylor arrived. The correspondent wrote,

...the way the boys crowded around him threatened immediate suffocation. By way of salutation I verily believe the old General

pulled at his cap five thousand times....  
 The General was mounted on a large and gentle mule, whilst his orderly rode a splendid dragoon horse and was himself dressed in a clean and handsome uniform, whilst the General had on the same old black frock coat and a big Mexican straw hat....the orderly got about six salutes to the General's one, the 'Suckers' taking him for the General....<sup>24</sup>

Although Taylor had little aspiration at this time to be President he did have one habit of a good politician — he took time to shake the hand of every volunteer. "By the time the two regiments finished squeezing (Taylor's hand)," wrote Peoples, "there could have been little feeling left in it." Finally, the general rode off on his mule, "many wondering if that was the animal on which he had charged the Mexicans."<sup>25</sup>

During the army's 10-day stay at Victoria the weather went from hot to freezing. Peoples noted trees which had been sought for shade a few days earlier were now cut down for firewood to melt the ice in the water buckets. Peoples also started to piece together the army's plans through conversations with officers. By January 11, he was able to make a highly accurate forecast of its objective. "I trust I am not wrong in telling Vera Cruz to tremble," he wrote. "We can all be in Tampico by (January 25)... (and the army) can be moved to Vera Cruz by land or water before the first day of March; giving us six to eight weeks to take the place — for take it we will, if we attack it — and then fall back, out of the range of the (yellow fever) epidemic."<sup>26</sup> Peoples' prediction appeared in the Delta on February 4, a month to the day before the American assault on

Vera Cruz began.

The question of whether it was ethical for reporters to use such information does not appear to have been an issue during the Mexican War, as it was during the American Civil War. There is some evidence the Mexicans monitored the New Orleans papers for military information, but apparently did not capitalize on it.

The march from Victoria to Tampico began on January 15, and proved a repeat of the disorganized, difficult march from Monterrey. The column was stretched out for more than seven miles. Peoples noted, "The road was so rugged that it was impossible to keep up." In most towns through which the army passed it "bought every pig, chicken and egg in the place," Peoples reported. On January 23, weary from eight days on the road, Peoples awoke at 3 a.m. and, leaving the troops behind, started for Tampico. After a five-hour ride he reached the port city, observing happily, "Although it is January, everything looks as green as May."<sup>27</sup>

After resting from the long march, Peoples started writing his observations about Tampico to the Delta. "The sale of spiritous liquors has been stopped...and it cannot be procured publicly, but from the number of drunken men about, and the frequent rows that occur, it must be as plenty as water...somewhere," he observed. A few days later he had the answer. "There is not a (Mexican) house or shanty...that does not exhibit something in the eating or drinking line for sale....and a sober man can always go into a back place and obtain aguadiente, muscal and



American whiskey."<sup>28</sup> The net result of this, Peoples observed, was a guard house filled with "rowdies and voluntarios." Much more enjoyable for the reporter were fandangos he attended. He found them "more chaste and agreeable" than those at Monterrey, particularly since an armed soldier stood in every corner to assure order.<sup>29</sup>

Peoples reported there was much dissatisfaction among officers at Tampico about having to find out the army's movements by reading the New Orleans papers. However, Peoples surmised Scott would be issuing all his orders through proper channels, and "they shall be news when issued." Throughout the month he spent at Tampico he reported on a wide range of rumors about what those orders might be. He refrained from guessing the exact plans, stating he was satisfied "to hold my peace...until I positively know something."<sup>30</sup>

Since the army might depart at any moment, Peoples decided to send letters to the Delta by every departing ship, even "if it is to say there is no news." As a result he supplied the Delta with a prolific series of letters on the army's activities during the days at Tampico. His work was not without hindrance, though. The Delta complained it was being singled out by the post office department workers for the paper's editorials critical of postal service. Peoples found this to be the case with his letters at Tampico, and he switched to addressing them to the publishing firm's full name — Davis, Corcoran & Co. — rather than to the Delta by name.<sup>31</sup>

To get his news, Peoples spent most of his days alternating between the army town, which was several miles from camp, and the city's Commercial Exchange. The exchange, he wrote, was "where newsmongers 'most do congregate.'" The exchange was the center for ship news, traveling foreigners (who often came from Mexico City or Vera Cruz), commercial mail and Mexican newspapers from the interior.

In addition to the drunkenness and misbehavior by the volunteers, Peoples was concerned about the rate at which they were being killed on the city's streets. He observed,

There was a time in Matamoros that the dead bodies of our countrymen found in the streets ceased to attract attention, so numerous were the assassinations, and the chances are much in favor of the same thing here. The Mexicans, independent of their natural hatred at this time, will kill an American for the smallest sum of money, or his clothing, and many a volunteer will fall to their knives.<sup>32</sup>

The army regulars did not have as severe a problem, Peoples reported, because they were confined to camp at night. Volunteers did not face these restrictions, and their officers seldom attempted to curtail their activities.<sup>33</sup> Rumors were spread continually in the army camps. In one letter, as he related some rumors, Peoples explained, "In noticing the reports I only do so to keep up with others." The soldiers readily swallowed the stories, he said, and as a result the size of Mexican units were swelled "five, ten and twenty-fold."<sup>34</sup>

An important story which developed at Tampico was the news of the capture of a company of American troops south of

Buena Vista near the Mexican town of Encarnacion. The 70 men became known as the "Encarnacion prisoners," and the incident was a running story in American papers throughout 1847. The story began when Taylor dispatched Major J.P. Gaines of the Kentucky Volunteers on a scouting mission to seek the location of Santa Anna. A prominent member of Gaines' command was Captain Cassius M. Clay, the noted Abolitionist editor, who had joined the Kentucky regiment. On January 21, 1847, the company set up a camp near Encarnacion, but failed to post guards. During the night a unit of approximately 2,000 Mexicans surrounded the site, and early the next morning, faced with overwhelming force, Gaines surrendered. The Americans were marched south to Mexico City, and imprisoned until late August, 1847, when Scott's army arrived. Because of repeated charges they were being mistreated in Mexican prisons, the prisoners received continuing, and often emotional coverage in the American press.<sup>35</sup>

Peoples first heard of the unit's capture from a friend who told him there was a copy of a Mexico City newspaper in Tampico with details of the incident. "After searching the city over I found it," Peoples related. It was a copy of El Republicano for February 2, 1847, and the story included a detailed list of the names and ranks of the captives.<sup>36</sup> Peoples mailed the story from Tampico on February 13, and it broke in the Delta on February 25.

Another story which began developing at Tampico was the battle of Buena Vista, but it was still in the rumor stage when

the reporters pulled out for Vera Cruz. On February 17, Peoples rode out to the camp, and immediately found himself surrounded by soldiers seeking details of a reported battle. "I was asked by a thousand persons if I had details of the fight," he wrote. Confused by the turmoil in the camp, Peoples went to General Twiggs' quarters to seek information. The division commander told him Mexican couriers had arrived from Victoria with reports of a battle. Peoples spent the day collecting details, and while he carefully classified it as rumor, he gave a fairly correct summary of the battle which was not fought until five days later, 250 miles to the east.<sup>37</sup>

During his travels with the army Peoples worked hard at building his sources with officers, particularly General Twiggs. Peoples felt Twiggs had not received proper credit for his contribution at Monterrey because the Picayune's Kendall and Haile "by accident" both accompanied Worth's division. When the news reached Tampico in mid-February that Twiggs had been promoted to major general, Peoples wrote, "The advancement of the brave old general fills me with joy." Peoples took the occasion to provide a detailed account of Twiggs' involvement at Monterrey, concluding, "I never should have alluded to this subject had not the promotion...called for it, for I had hoped that some more able pen than I can wield would have referred to it."<sup>38</sup>

While at Tampico Peoples took time to go from the pen to the printer's case. With so many American troops stationed at the Mexican port city it became possible for the American newsmen

to establish another newspaper, and on February 6, 1847, the Tampico Sentinel made its debut. Two New Orleans printers, J.R. Barnard and William Jewell, established the new paper, with the assistance of Peoples. Lumsden of the Picayune is reported to have participated for a short period as editor.<sup>39</sup> Lumsden, at any rate, was impressed with the new publication. He called it "a neat little paper." Regarding the publishers, he said, "They are worthy, respectable and enterprising practical printers, and most sincerely do I wish them success in their praiseworthy undertaking. This is another improvement -- an American newspaper in Tampico!"<sup>40</sup>

Barnard, Jewell and Peoples operated the paper until March, when they followed the main body of the army to Vera Cruz. Ownership of the Sentinel passed into the hands of John G. Gibson, a veteran newsman with a national reputation who had once edited the New Orleans True American.<sup>41</sup> Gibson, who also served as an official in the American court at Tampico, operated the Sentinel until his death in October, 1847.<sup>42</sup> The exact ownership of the paper after his death is unclear. It resumed publication in late October, 1847 and was quoted in the New Orleans press as late as March, 1848.<sup>43</sup>

Events, meanwhile, were moving to a conclusion at Tampico. Kendall arrived on March 3, three weeks behind Haile.<sup>44</sup> Frenner of the Delta also was on hand. It was clear to the correspondents the weather and army were starting to move rapidly. By the middle of February the weather was getting warmer, and

another problem was developing for the reporters. "With all its pleasure, Tampico has one drawback upon a stranger's comfort," an occasional correspondent of the Delta wrote. "Musquitoes. (sic) Well may it be said, 'there's no rest for the wicked;' and the pious suffer some, for the hot sun in the day time and the clouds of poisonous insects at night."<sup>45</sup> Peoples noted the weather in Tampico was "hot and oppressive" and predicted "the generals will lose no time in mounting the Vera Cruz attack since vomito (yellow fever) — feared more by American soldiers than anything else — is due in 4 to 6 weeks."<sup>46</sup>

The Tampico period was one of several lulls during the Mexican War. The army needed time to get organized and mount its assault on the fortress at Vera Cruz. In the interim the printer-correspondents turned to writing about camp life and daily life in the occupied territory. Their reports, often filling three and four columns of type, provided the American public with its primary information about the army and events in Mexico, and still serve as a valuable primary source today regarding the conditions of that period.

## NOTES

1. St. Louis Reveille, January 9, 1847.
2. Smith, op. cit., Chapt. 18.
3. New Orleans Crescent, March 31, 1848. Also see Crescent, June 16, August 7, September 23, 1848.
4. New Orleans Delta, March 3, 1847. Also see Delta, December 29, 1847, August 8, 1848. New Orleans Picayune, September 1, 1848.
5. Ibid.
6. Some biographical information on Peoples is available in Spell, op. cit., p. 25. Most of the research included in this chapter was obtained from a close reading of his letters over a two-year period.
7. For examples see Baltimore Sun, February 2, 1847; Philadelphia North American, February 24, 1847.
8. New Orleans Delta, November 14, 1846.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid., December 29, 1846.
12. Ibid.
13. New Orleans Delta, December 27, 1846. In justice to Peoples, it should be noted this particular item did not appear in the Delta until after the army had departed for Victoria, thus not "leaking" its destination.
14. Augusta (Georgia) Chronicle and Sentinel, February 2, 1847.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. New Orleans Picayune, December 20, 1846.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid., December 31, 1846; January 2, 1847.

21. Ibid., January 6, 1847.
22. Ibid., March 16, 1847.
23. New Orleans Delta, January 27, 1847.
24. Ibid. This was a popular anecdote about Taylor, and appeared in several newspapers with slight variations.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid., February 4, 1847.
27. Ibid., February 13, 1847.
28. Ibid. Aguadiante was brandy and muscal a local wine.
29. Ibid., February 17, 1847.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid., February 18, 25, 1847.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid., February 25, 1847.
35. Smith, op. cit., I:370-1. Clay did not participate in the war's coverage, but included in the protracted coverage of the prisoner incident was a letter to the editors of the Picayune from Clay while he was imprisoned at Mexico City. He explained the conditions of the prisoners and urged Santa Anna to free them. Picayune, May 25, 1847.
36. New Orleans Delta, February 25, 1847.
37. Ibid., March 2, 1847. The story demonstrates how accurate the rumors could be on occasion.
38. Ibid.
39. Spell, op. cit., p. 25.
40. New Orleans Picayune, February 18, 1848.
41. New Orleans Delta, March 23, 1847.
42. New Orleans Picayune, November 9, 1847.



43. New Orleans Delta, March 28, 1848.
44. New Orleans Picayune, March 18, 1847.
45. New Orleans Delta, December 27, 1847.
46. Ibid., March 3, 16, 1847.

## CHAPTER 10

### BATTLE OF BUENA VISTA

The battle of Buena Vista, one of the most bloody and desperate of the war, received the poorest press coverage of any in the two-year conflict. This circumstance was more an accident than a calculation on the part of the correspondents. As it did throughout most of the conflict, the press took its lead from the military as to where the action would be. Since Winfield Scott obviously was moving men and ships south along the coast for an assault on Vera Cruz, it seemed logical that would be the next major battle. Kendall had departed from New Orleans for Vera Cruz in late February, the Picayune announcing he "was headed for Brazos, Tampico and the seat of war."<sup>1</sup> Haile and Lumsden of the Picayune already were en route, as were Frenner and Peoples of the Delta, and other American correspondents who wrote regularly from the camps.

But one key person in the drama was not headed for Vera Cruz. General Santa Anna, recently returned from exile in Cuha and newly named president of Mexico, was headed north towards Monterrey in an attempt to take advantage of the divided American

forces.<sup>2</sup> Santa Anna had a key advantage over the Americans at this point. His forces had intercepted secret American messages and he was aware that Scott was taking troops from Taylor's army for the flanking attack at Vera Cruz. Moving rapidly to try to take advantage of Taylor's weakened position, Santa Anna secretly marched north from Mexico City. He apparently hoped to defeat Taylor, or at least cause him to retreat from Monterrey, before Scott could become established at Vera Cruz.<sup>3</sup>

Taylor, meanwhile, had overextended his lines beyond Saltillo, 65 miles south of Monterrey. He was almost totally unprepared for the sudden arrival of Santa Anna's forces on February 19, but withdrew quickly to a preselected defensive battle site at Buena Vista, seven miles south of Saltillo. Santa Anna had the numerical advantage, about 21,000 troops to Taylor's estimated 6,000, a majority of whom were volunteer troops. But in a two-day battle February 22-23, 1847 Taylor's smaller force, held its ground and forced the Mexican army to withdraw. Casualties were heavy on both sides and the outcome in doubt to the end. It was the last major battle fought in the north, although the war continued for another 17 months. However, it was received in the United States as a great victory. Additionally, it greatly reinforced Taylor's popular war hero image, which boosted him to the presidency in 1848.<sup>4</sup>

By the start of the New Year the New Orleans press had sensed Santa Anna was preparing to move north and that some major action might be in the offing. On January 5 the New Orleans

Delta said it was waiting "with great impatience for the news" regarding Santa Anna's advance on Saltillo.<sup>5</sup> The Picayune carried a report Santa Anna was moving on Saltillo with a force of 30,000 men and "that the whole valley of the Rio Grande was in a state of ferment."<sup>6</sup> But all reports appeared to be only rumors, and the American forces meanwhile continued to shift troops from the north for the assault at Vera Cruz. The rumors of an impending battle at Saltillo continued, however, and soon became a flood for the American newspapers.<sup>7</sup>

A writer for the Charleston Courier, after reading the latest papers from Mexico, Texas and Havana, observed: "It is enough to bewilder any brain of common capacity to go through the tangled maze of rumors and come to any 'fixed facts' or definite conclusions as to what are truths, and what not." The writer continued, "Reading newspapers is becoming an obtuse science... requiring intense application, and after getting through five or six columns, one has a disagreeable doubt as to whether he is wiser than before or not."<sup>8</sup> After 10 days of varying rumors that Taylor had fought a battle, the Courier commented, "Altogether, the news is vague, but exciting, and only occasions an ardent desire for something more."<sup>9</sup> After another five days of the same, the paper noted, "Rumors, rumors, rumors, are still the order of the day...all fudge, of course, but hundreds are found willing to believe and circulate them."<sup>10</sup> Echoing the concern over the rumors, the Augusta (Georgia) Chronicle and Sentinel said it "expected a succession of important and perhaps bloody

events." It assured readers, "We shall look out constantly for stirring news."<sup>11</sup> Amid reports Taylor was retreating, the spirited St. Louis Reveille stated it "would support General Taylor come what will," adding that "the suspense and anxiety is painful."<sup>12</sup> In Baltimore the Sun said the rumors about Taylor's army were "well calculated to excite considerable alarm."<sup>13</sup> It attempted to bolster public opinion by stating it had confidence in Taylor's "skill, prudence and valor." As the rumors continued, however, it admitted, they "oblige us to admit there is serious cause to apprehend disaster."<sup>14</sup>

In New Orleans the papers were trying hard to sort out the truth from the conflicting stories. Kendall arrived at Tampico on March 4 and found the city rife with rumors regarding Taylor's situation. He attempted to get the facts and ended up reporting there had not been a battle. "Mr. K announces that General Taylor has fallen back, and without an action, in so confident a manner that we place very great reliance upon his news," the Picayune stated on March 19, not realizing, of course, that the battle already had been fought.<sup>15</sup> The Picayune also noted the continuing reports "leave little doubt Santa Anna... made an important move...but the direction is a mystery....A very pretty state of things for newsmongers this."<sup>16</sup>

Amid all the garbled reports the New Orleans Delta observed the most definite statement it had seen about Santa Anna was in a letter from Mexico in the Spanish-language La Patria of

New Orleans. It had been mailed from Tampico on February 9, and claimed Santa Anna was advancing towards Saltillo with "16,000 good troops."<sup>17</sup> Another report believed authentic reached the New Orleans papers via the Mexico City El Republicano, which said Santa Anna was en route to Monterrey with 21,000 troops, and gave a unit-by-unit breakdown of his forces. The same paper said Taylor was at Saltillo with 6,000 men and sixteen guns. The detail of the story led the Picayune to comment: "This shows again the accuracy of the information possessed by the Mexicans of our movements."<sup>18</sup> Another report which the New Orleans papers agreed was probably authentic came from a Mexico City newspaper item which appeared in the Tampico Sentinel March 6. It was printed in New Orleans on March 19.<sup>19</sup> The item was a letter Santa Anna had sent to the Mexican War Ministry on February 17 predicting he would engage Taylor's forces at Agua Nueva (15 miles south of Buena Vista) on February 21.

In mid-March the Picayune observed: "The cry has been 'wolf, wolf' for so long a time that it is about time the 'wolf' should come."<sup>20</sup> And finally, in the third week of March, almost a month after the battle had been fought, the first accounts did start to come. The first fairly accurate report appeared in the American Flag at Matamoros, stating a battle had been fought by Taylor at Agua Nueva on February 22 against 21,000 Mexicans. By March 14 the New Orleans papers agreed there had been a battle February 22-23 near Saltillo, adding Taylor "fell back in good order...." Even this would be a victory, the Picayune and Delta

claimed.<sup>21</sup> A Delta correspondent stationed near the mouth of the Rio Grande wrote:

Under the present circumstances you will be extremely anxious to know the rumors from this quarter. I wish I could myself ascertain the truth, which among the thousand lies that are circulating, is like a grain of wheat in a bushel of chaff....<sup>22</sup>

On the same day another Delta correspondent at the same location wrote that "a private express has just arrived with the news, or report, that Taylor has defeated Santa Anna...."<sup>23</sup>

These indications were too much for the Delta's editors, and they decided to take a chance. Their headline on Sunday morning, March 21, read:

VICTORY! VICTORY! VICTORY!

Good News from Gen. Taylor

This was followed by a cautious lead: "Although these reports are still vague and indefinite, enough can be gathered from them to give every assurance that Gen. Taylor has whipped Santa Anna."<sup>24</sup> The story was inconclusive, primarily a careful re-statement of the facts as best known, but topped off with the unsubstantiated conclusion that Taylor had won a great victory. True or not, the Delta's story had the ring of truth, and was carried to the north where many of the papers used it along with headlines of the alleged Taylor triumph.<sup>25</sup>

One loud skeptic of the Delta's version was the Mobile Advertiser, which accused the New Orleans paper of "guess work" and crediting the Picayune with the only "authentic news."<sup>26</sup> But

the Buena Vista story was one of the few of the war on which the Picayune was not first on the streets with the news. However, its "loss" was only marginal, at best. The express rider carrying messages for the Picayune and Evening Mercury reached New Orleans at approximately 4 p.m. on March 21. The Mercury, being an evening paper, was able to get an extra edition out by 5:30 p.m., while the morning Picayune's extra was available an hour later. "The accounts are from the same source and correspond exactly," the Charleston Courier's New Orleans correspondent reported.<sup>27</sup>

So, finally, on March 21, a month after the battle had commenced on the plains at Buena Vista the news reached the United States. The reason for the long delay is not hard to understand, though. The circumstances were similar to those following the battle at Monterrey. Taylor's small army, greatly exhausted and short of personnel after the narrow costly victory, had taken several days to collect its wits, bury its dead and strengthen its position before it started to write reports about what had happened. Further, without any regular newspaper correspondents at the scene, there was little sense of rushing to be "first with the news." And again, as after Monterrey, the roads to the rear of the American lines were controlled by the Mexican guerrilla forces. Because so many men had been thrown into the battle there were insufficient troops remaining at Monterrey to provide guards for a special courier to the north. As a result, on March 2, eight days after the battle ended, Taylor's official



accounts of it were still at Monterrey.

In a letter published in the Delta, John B. Butler, the army paymaster at Monterrey, explained the American position there was "too weak" to provide an escort of the size required for safety. Instead, he said, on March 2 he hired a Mexican rider at his own expense to go to Camargo. Butler wrote, "The effort is at least worth being made. In the worst event that can happen, I lose my horse and a hundred dollars." Twelve hours later Butler sent off another Mexican express rider, costing him another \$60 and another horse.<sup>28</sup> It took nine days for the Mexican messenger to reach Camargo, finally making it through by detouring several hundred miles around "the Mexican forces and rancheros that swarmed in the valley."<sup>29</sup>

From Camargo an army doctor named Turner took over as courier for Taylor's accounts of the victory, travelling first to Matamoros. The Picayune did not have one of its regular correspondents there at the time, but an occasional correspondent, Army Lieutenant J.J.C. Bibb, prepared a synopsis of the battle and casualty reports, and forwarded them to the Picayune by ship. An agent for the Picayune and the Evening Mercury boarded the ship as it entered the Mississippi, obtained the information, and carried it by express to the city. Although it was a Monday, a day the paper didn't publish, the Picayune assembled its staff and brought out an extra edition the same evening. As happened so often throughout the war, the press had beaten the government messenger again, this time by two days.<sup>30</sup>

Undaunted by the Picayune's break, the Delta's lead the next day started: "Where now are the skeptics who threw doubt and discredit upon our statement...Sunday respecting the victory of Gen. Taylor?"<sup>31</sup> Ignoring the criticism it was receiving for having printed so positive a story without having verification, the Delta added, "They must admit we are pretty good at guessing."<sup>32</sup>

It was the Picayune account, however, which was carried to the North by the express riders and which provided the country with the first authentic news of the surprising victory by Taylor's small army. Within 10 days the story covered the country. The express carrying the news used a variety of conveyances to make the trip. From New Orleans to Mobile the courier travelled by boat. Then a series of pony expresses carried the news to Augusta, Georgia. There the message was placed on a train, which carried it to Charleston. At Charleston it was placed on board a boat which carried the U.S. mail to Washington, D.C., on a daily basis. At Washington the messages and newspapers were turned over to various newspaper agents, and the contents telegraphed to the other cities of the north.<sup>33</sup> The news reached Charleston on March 28, Washington March 30, and was in the papers of Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York and Boston on March 31.

The eagerness to forward the news is shown by the garbled account which reached Augusta, Georgia on March 27. Under a

heading "Important If True," the Augusta Chronicle and Sentinel reported, "We have been politely furnished with a copy of the following endorsement written on the way bill from Montgomery." The message on the way bill read, "Gen. Taylor has had a great battle, killed 5000 Mexicans, ran Santa Anna 18 miles, 1100 Americans killed. This may be relied on. C.A. Miller." Unfortunately for the Augusta papers, when confirmation came the next day it was a Sunday, and they had to wait until the following morning to issue their extras.<sup>34</sup>

Ironically, confirmation and information about the battle reached New Orleans from Mexican and American sources on the same day. And the news from Mexican sources was considered more important because it was Santa Anna's official report to his government. It reached New Orleans from Tampico, where Barnard and Jewell had published it in an extra edition of the Sentinel on March 11. Barnard, returning to New Orleans on a business trip, had personally carried the information to the New Orleans press.<sup>35</sup> The Sentinel had obtained the account of the battle from a Mexican newspaper, El Soldado de la Patria at San Luis Poltosi, where Santa Anna stopped after retreating from Buena Vista. Santa Anna's official version was misleading, claiming victory, but it contained more details of the engagement than the American papers had been able to obtain from any other source.<sup>36</sup>

In running the accounts of the battle from the Mexican papers at length, the Picayune explained, "(Mexicans) sometimes meet with a sneer that (American) accounts are exaggerated and

one-sided — that if the whole truth were known, that there would be less occasion for rejoicing....We are determined that this time the Mexicans shall have all the benefit of their own statements, in all the copiousness that we are able to give them."<sup>37</sup> Following the lead of the Picayune, the Augusta (Georgia) Chronicle and Sentinel, also extensively used the Mexican newspaper accounts, but cautioned readers, "As these details are from a Mexican journal we of course have to receive them as such, and give them just so much credence as each individual may suppose them to be worth, making a proper allowance for the known disposition of this people to exaggerate everything...."<sup>38</sup>

What first-hand coverage of Buena Vista there was came from some of the war's lesser known correspondents. Haile of the Picayune, who had received wide praise from the country's press for his coverage of Monterrey, came closest of the regular reporters to being at Buena Vista. Haile rejoined the Picayune staff in late December, 1846 for another tour as a correspondent with the army. The New Orleans paper boasted proudly: "Hereafter we will be kept always posted upon war news by a gentleman whose experience in military affairs is scarcely inferior to his accomplishments as a correspondent."<sup>39</sup> Although Haile's previous army reporting had been voluminous, the Picayune added, "we never had occasion to correct any revelation of his."

Haile's original plan had been to rejoin Worth's Second Division, with whom he had fought at Monterrey. When he reached Brazos Island on Christmas Day 1846 he learned Worth's division

was at Saltillo, and reportedly in danger from attack by Santa Anna's army. (This was the same false alarm which had sent John Peopless' unit scrambling back to Monterrey). Haile departed the same night on a steamboat for Camargo.<sup>40</sup>

Haile found that the military commanders along the Rio Grande believed another major battle was going to be fought at or near Monterrey. Fearing he might not reach Worth's division in time, Haile made arrangements to travel to Monterrey immediately with a small courier detachment. Although the route still was under threat of guerrilla attack, the couriers, accompanied by an escort of 70 dragoons, covered the 300 miles to Monterrey in 14 days, arriving January 8. The trip was hectic and difficult, but Haile was "exhilarated to be back in the wilds of Mexico."<sup>41</sup> Isn't this better than sitting on a high stool in a counting room?," he asked in a letter to the Picayune. Expanding on his feelings of why he wanted to be a correspondent again he wrote:

Is not this glorious appetite, this free air, this wild scenery, the novelties we are constantly meeting with — is not an idea of all of this enough to make you feel dumpish as you sit poring over the 'last mail,' and reading and making deductions from the 'rumors from Washington'...? If not, so much the better for you, but I try to lash myself into the belief that you are all miserable there at home, and that we are the only happy fellows who belong to the States.<sup>42</sup>

At Monterrey Haile was surprised to learn Worth's command was preparing to move back up the Rio Grande, en route to join Scott's army for the assault on Vera Cruz. Haile decided to stay with Worth. Although "exhausted" from the hectic trip to Monterrey,

he made immediate plans to retrace the path with Worth's troops. "Wherever Worth goes I shall follow him," Haile wrote, "for I know if anything is to be done he will have a hand in it." Additionally, Haile noted, Worth would have "the crack troops of the army under him." Haile's military knowledge and instincts led him to remain with the largest unit of regular troops. Although Taylor was returning to Monterrey to reassume command of the troops in that area, Haile believed there would be more action with Scott's army. "His movements will be rapid," Haile wrote of Scott, "and I hope and believe that he will make a brilliant and successful demonstration somewhere very soon." The next day, January 11, Haile rejoined Worth's troops, and started the long trip that was to lead them to the beaches of Vera Cruz.<sup>43</sup>

Another experienced correspondent, George Tobin of the Delta, fought in the battle and prepared detailed accounts of it for his paper as soon as the fighting ended. Tobin had rejoined the army in January as member of a Texas Ranger spy company.<sup>44</sup> He had been on scouting missions in the Saltillo area throughout most of the month before the battle and was on the field during the two-day struggle. However, most of Tobin's Buena Vista reports did not reach the Delta. The paper learned later Tobin gave a large packet of letters he compiled at the battlefield to a messenger to carry to Monterrey to forward to New Orleans. At Monterrey the messenger learned he could not travel to Camargo "for some time," and chose to leave the reports at the post office for forwarding to the Delta. The paper remarked, ruefully,

"There are a hundred chances to one that we shall never see them, or that, if we do it will be at a time when they are useless."<sup>45</sup> Tobin's reports, together with a list of killed and wounded, finally reached the paper on April 10. But, as the Delta had feared, "too late," since the information was contained in the official battle reports already reprinted from the Washington Union.<sup>46</sup>

Two papers which did receive first-hand accounts of the battle were the Louisville Journal and the Vicksburg (Miss.) Whig. The Journal's report came from Josiah Gregg, trader, explorer, doctor and occasional correspondent to the Galveston (Tex.) Daily Advertiser, the Arkansas Intelligencer and Louisville Journal.<sup>47</sup> He also was the author of a noted book on the Old Southwest region, Commerce of the Prairies.<sup>48</sup> Gregg had joined General Wool's command in 1846 as a member of the Arkansas volunteer regiment. Because of his knowledge of the area he had expected to be extensively utilized by Wool as a scout and adviser, but was not. Gregg grew impatient with the army's slow progress and had personality problems with Wool, who suspected Gregg was writing critical letters about him to newspapers.<sup>49</sup> For Gregg the campaign had become a series of "irritations, inefficiencies and humiliations," for which he blamed Wool.<sup>50</sup>

By the time of the battle Gregg's role with the army had become uncertain, and he did not consider himself officially attached to it any longer. One biographer has stated "unofficially he was a war correspondent."<sup>51</sup> Another wrote Gregg was "tempted

many times to give up his association with the army and set out as a free-lance reporter of the campaign."<sup>52</sup> Compared to the writers for the New Orleans press, the term "war correspondent" is probably too strong to apply to Gregg, but his eye-witness account of Buena Vista is among the best.

Amid the many rumors about Santa Anna's movements, Gregg had received private information from a Mexican friend, who formerly had served as an army spy. "I place but little reliance in his stories," Gregg wrote to his brother, but the information proved fairly accurate.<sup>53</sup> On February 21, with the battle imminent, Gregg joined the Arkansas Cavalry at an advanced position in the small town of Agua Nueva, where the unit was guarding supplies. That night, about 11 o'clock, the advance cavalry guard of Santa Anna's army reached the area, causing a rapid evacuation by the American units. After managing a few hours sleep at Saltillo, Gregg joined Taylor's forces on the main battlefield the next morning, February 22. Throughout the afternoon and evening he watched light skirmishing between the two armies. When the maneuvering ended at dark Gregg returned to Saltillo and spent the night. He arrived back at the scene the next morning just as the first Mexican attack began. "The force of the enemy was overwhelming — 3 or 4 to one," he wrote. "The fire was incessant...a most terrible roar. I did not expect raw volunteers to stand so severe a fire, and less did I expect the Mexicans to endure it."<sup>54</sup>

As the Mexicans continued to advance easily Gregg feared



the battle was going to be lost. He moved to a high point toward the rear of the battle area and witnessed an attack by American cavalry which dispersed some Mexican rancheros who were threatening the Americans' rear. Gregg wrote cryptically, "Some have since endeavored...to give much credit to the charge of Col. May's command in this case. For my own part, I saw nothing praiseworthy, in the affair, and, if justice should be meted out with impartiality, I fear the reverse would be the result."<sup>55</sup>

In his role as a civilian observer, Gregg attempted to move to those portions of the field where the fighting seemed most intense. When the Mexican cavalry charged into some Arkansas and Kentucky troops, Gregg rode over and found his friend Colonel Archibald Yell dead from a lance wound. Shortly afterwards, Gregg, about 200 yards behind the center of the American line, found himself under intensive fire. He wrote:

A more incessant fire of volley after volley, of musketry, accompanied by the rapid fire of artillery, too high, almost universally, I was perhaps in more danger than if I had been in the line...Such a whizzing of balls on either side -- before -- behind -- above -- could only be compared to a hail-stone in a hurricane....I heard one strike upon the blanket of my saddle but it was too far spent to penetrate.<sup>56</sup>

The Americans rallied and held their lines and gradually the fighting fell off as the Mexicans pulled back. Gregg was confident "the Mexicans were whipped," and rode around the area to tell others. When night fell he returned to Saltillo, and awoke to the news the Mexicans had indeed retreated.<sup>57</sup> He returned to tour the battlefield, writing, "and dreadful was the

view! Large numbers of our own dead yet lay upon the field! But still greater quantities of Mexicans were scattered there."<sup>58</sup>

At one place on the battlefield he came to a spot where seven Mexicans "had been mowed down by a single cannonball." In other areas he saw three, four or five killed by one shell. The effectiveness of the American artillery, he concluded, had made the difference. Gregg also took time to find the body of his friend Yell to assure that it was properly buried.

He remained with the army for five weeks after the battle, writing letters to the Journal, Arkansas Intelligencer, his family, and recording a detailed diary of the battle. When an opportunity came to serve another army unit as a scout and interpreter Gregg took it. He returned to the Saltillo area in Autumn, 1847, and worked there as a doctor until Spring the following year. That Gregg's reports to newspapers were only incidental to his other activities is clear from his method of handling his letters. They were not sent directly to the paper, but rather to its editor, usually a personal friend of Gregg. The issue of whether the letter should be published or not was then left to the editor, who in most cases did use them.<sup>59</sup>

The regular reports which the Vicksburg Whig received came from R.K. Arthur, a volunteer with the Mississippi regiment. Arthur reflected the perilous position of Taylor's smaller army on the eve of the battle when he wrote, "This little army may possibly be whipped, but there will not be many left if it should" occur.<sup>60</sup> The Mississippi regiment played a crucial role in the

battle, and the Picayune called Arthur's account "one of the most vivid" written.<sup>61</sup>

In the absence of the regular correspondents, the New Orleans papers had to turn to accounts from the participants. Many of the articles were romantically written and filled with unsubstantiated facts and opinions. Most of the stories also greatly added to the image and growing legend of Taylor, and before long he became a serious presidential candidate. While the letters usually all praised Taylor, there was a long running dispute in the press after the battle about who had actually selected the battlefield, Taylor or Wool.<sup>62</sup> An account signed "Buena Vista" in the New Orleans Tropic, which appears to have been a constant source of romantic stories about the war, gives the flavor of many of the post-battle articles. It started, "The morning was bright and beautiful. Not a cloud floated toward the firmament nor dimmed the azure of the sky, and the flood of golden radiance, which gilded the mountain tops, and poured over the valleys, wrought light and shade into a thousand fantastic forms...."<sup>63</sup>

Another article from the Tropic illustrates several of the popularly held notions regarding Taylor: his cool manner under pressure and refusal to retreat in face of adversity. In the story an officer of a Kentucky volunteer regiment, reportedly "completely surrounded" and on the verge of being "totally annihilated," asked Taylor "what to do."

General Taylor promptly replied to the adjutant, (whose countenance was the perfect picture of despair) in the coolest manner imaginable, saying, 'go and tell your Colonel that he has got them where he wants them, and now is the time to give them Jessee.' Whereupon the adjutant wheeled his horse, clapped his spurs to him, dashed up to the little band, and shouted at the top of his voice, 'Boys, General Taylor says we've got them where we want them, and now's our time to give them hell!' The intrepid Kentuckians caught the impulse like electricity, raised a cheer, and with their naked bayonets, routed them completely, and drove them from the field.<sup>64</sup>

It was at Buena Vista that the war's famous phrase, "A little more grape, Captain Bragg," came into existence. The first reports from the battlefield quoted Taylor as having issued this order in a cool and calm voice when the artillery battery of Captain Braxton Bragg turned back a major Mexican attack during the battle's decisive moments. The statement established a national reputation for Bragg, and was widely used to symbolize Taylor's presidential campaign. Bragg later told the press the first he heard of the phrase was "by newspapers from the U.S." Taylor had never stated it during the battle, Bragg said, and added, "Many events and much reputation as they exist in the popular mind (in the States) had no other origin than in the same inventive faculty of the press and its correspondents."<sup>65</sup> Regardless of whether it was ever stated, the Picayune's observation that the statement "is a sure passport to historical distinction" proved closest to the truth.<sup>66</sup>

One of the first printed accounts of the statement appeared in the New Orleans Tropic shortly after the battle. The

anecdote, headlined "The Way General Taylor Inspires his Soldiers with Confidence," related:

While Bragg was slaying them left, right and centre, General Taylor quietly rode up behind him, without being observed, and in an undertone of voice said, "A little more grape, Captain Bragg!" Those few words so completely inspirited him and his men that they fired with redoubled vigor, and the result shows the effort of "a little more grape."<sup>67</sup>

Whatever its true origin, the story soon crisscrossed the country and added to the growing support for a Taylor candidacy. Taylor, overwhelmed with the newspaper accounts of his victory, and the ensuing praise, soon started to play the role. Josiah Gregg, who was still writing occasional accounts to the Louisville Journal and the Arkansas Intelligencer, was "surprised" by the change in Taylor. In late May he stopped by Taylor's camp at Monterrey to say hello and was startled "to see him in uniform: that is, with blue cloth pants (and I think stripes), a blue cloth coat, with buttons and shoulder straps, and a somewhat new cap -- all in striking contrast with anything I had ever seen him wear before: for I had never seen nor heard of his wearing since he entered Mexico, anything but an old brown citizen coat..."<sup>68</sup>

Gregg surmised, "Seeing the parade made in the U.S. about him, he had begun to conclude that he really was a much greater man than he had ever before dreamed of, and consequently must command more respect." Gregg also suspected Taylor was "dressing up" on that day to impress a unit of visiting Missouri volunteers.<sup>69</sup>

Although the press had failed to supply first-hand

coverage of Buena Vista, it still fulfilled the important role it took on throughout the war. When the news finally reached the States it was brought by a newspaper messenger, beating the government courier by two days. And it was the newspaper express system which carried the news of the victory to the rest of the nation. The pressure to be "first with the news" was having an impact on the press' reaction to the war's events, and would be seen many more times before it was over.

## NOTES

1. New Orleans Picayune, February 23, 1847.
2. Smith, op. cit., I:347-400.
3. Ibid., I:370-383; For the best book on Buena Vista and the events on the Northern front see David Lavender, Climax at Buena Vista (Philadelphia & New York: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1966).
4. Ibid.; Also see Smith, op. cit., I:400.
5. New Orleans Delta, January 5, 1847.
6. New Orleans Picayune, January 3, 1847.
7. For examples see Washington Union, March 5, 1847; St. Louis Reveille, March 23, 1847; Baltimore Sun, March 23, 1847.
8. Charleston Courier, February 24, 1847.
9. Ibid., March 18, 1847.
10. Ibid., March 23, 1847.
11. Augusta (Georgia) Chronicle and Sentinel, March 16, 1847.
12. St. Louis Reveille, March 21, 1847.
13. Baltimore Sun, March 23, 1847.
14. Ibid., March 24, 1847.
15. New Orleans Picayune, March 19, 1847.
16. Ibid., March 2, 1847.
17. New Orleans La Patria, February 24, 1847, quoted in New Orleans Delta, February 25, 1847.
18. New Orleans Picayune, March 9, 1847. The information, interestingly, was highly accurate.
19. Ibid., March 21, 1847; New Orleans Delta, March 19, 1847.
20. New Orleans Picayune, March 13, 1847.
21. New Orleans Picayune and Delta, March 14, 1847.
22. New Orleans Delta, March 21, 1847.

23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. For examples see Washington Union, March 29, 1847, and Philadelphia North American, March 30, 1847.
26. New Orleans Delta, March 28, 1847; Also critical of the Delta was the Savannah (Georgia) Republican, quoted in Delta, March 27, 1847.
27. Charleston Courier, March 29, 1847.
28. Delta, March 27, 1847. The first American military couriers left Monterrey on March 4.
29. New Orleans Picayune, March 24, 1847.
30. Ibid., March 23, 1847.
31. New Orleans Delta, March 23, 1847.
32. Ibid., March 25, 1847.
33. See Charleston Courier, April 5, 15, 24, 1847.
34. Augusta (Georgia) Chronicle and Sentinel, March 27, 29, 1847.
35. New Orleans Delta and Picayune, March 23, 1847.
36. See New Orleans Delta, March 23, 1847, and Picayune, March 24, 1847.
37. Ibid.
38. Augusta (Georgia) Chronicle and Sentinel, March 29, 1847.
39. New Orleans Picayune, January 7, 1847.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid., January 19, 1847.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid.
44. New Orleans Delta, January 24, 1847.
45. Ibid., April 6, 1847.



46. Ibid., April 10, 1847.
47. See Josiah Gregg, The Diary and Letters of Josiah Gregg, 2 vols., edited by Maurice G. Fulton (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1941, 1944).
48. Josiah Gregg, Commerce of the Prairies, (2 vols. New York: H.G. Langley, 1844).
49. Gregg, Diary, op. cit., I:55-70.
50. Ibid.
51. Ibid.
52. Ibid.
53. Ibid.
54. Ibid., I:48.
55. Ibid., I:49.
56. Ibid., I:53.
57. Ibid., I:54.
58. Ibid., I:55.
59. Ibid., I:64.
60. New Orleans Picayune, March 27, 1847.
61. Ibid., April 7, 1847.
62. For an example see Ibid., July 7, 1847.
63. Washington Union, April 6, 1847.
64. Quoted in St. Louis Reveille, April 7, 1847.
65. Bragg is quoted in the Mobile (Ala.) Register and Journal, January 22, 1849, reprinted in Picayune, January 23, 1849.
66. New Orleans Picayune, June 27, 1848.
67. Quoted in St. Louis Reveille, April 7, 1847.
68. Gregg, op. cit., pp. 138-9.
69. Ibid.

## CHAPTER 11

### SIEGE AT VERA CRUZ

Vera Cruz on the central east coast of Mexico was a historical invasion route into the country, and Mexican and American newspapers had speculated from the start of the war that sooner or later the Polk Administration would launch an expedition against it. A final decision to follow this route had been slow in coming, however, because the President could not accept the necessity of appointing either Winfield Scott or Zachary Taylor, the potential Whig presidential contenders, to head the expedition. It finally became clear in late Fall, 1846, however, that only Scott had the capacity to carry out the assignment. Polk reluctantly appointed the general to the command, and by February, 1847 Scott had assembled an invasion army of 10,000 men at Tampico and Lobos Island in the Gulf of Mexico.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile, the Mexican government had many indications the invasion was imminent. As early as November, 1846 it had read details of a possible invasion in a New Orleans newspaper.<sup>2</sup> There had been various attempts to strengthen Vera Cruz and its fortress, San Juan de Ulúa, but without much success. However, it

still was a substantial military obstacle when Scott landed his army on the beaches south of the city on March 9, 1847, in the first major amphibious landing in the history of American arms. A 20-day siege and bombardment followed, the Americans encircling the fortress with a six-mile perimeter. On March 28, following days of virtually unopposed shelling by the American guns, the city surrendered. Long anticipated by the press and public, the victory was received as yet another example of American destiny and invincibility.<sup>3</sup>

Contributing to this atmosphere, was an intense amount of newspaper speculation regarding Scott's objective. The speculation grew to such extremes that the Picayune finally observed, "The object in sending Gen. Scott to the South is a matter of so much curiosity that anything explanatory of his mission will be acceptable to the reader."<sup>4</sup> Even the Washington letter writers were "unable to guess Scott's destination," the Baltimore Sun wrote.<sup>5</sup> The Courier in Charleston predicted he would land at Vera Cruz, but feared he might not succeed, "thus prolonging the war."<sup>6</sup>

Having long anticipated the Vera Cruz landing, the press was well represented when it occurred. Kendall, Haile and Lumsden of the Picayune, Frenner and Peoples of the Delta, and a correspondent on the scene for the first time, William C. Tobey of the Philadelphia North American, all participated in the reporting.

Kendall, with his usual energy, supplied the most

extensive accounts, and again made careful arrangements to have his reports and those of Haile and Lumsden relayed quickly to New Orleans. Kendall went ashore the first day, March 9, and spent much of his time riding around the sand hills observing various American units. At night he usually slept aboard an American naval vessel, the Princeton or the Albany. "It would take a page of our paper to give full effect to a description of the first landing of our troops," Kendall wrote to the Picayune after watching the assault on March 9.<sup>7</sup> "A more stirring spectacle has probably never been witnessed in America." More than 70 surf boats filled with almost 4,000 men were in the first wave, Kendall said. "Every man was anxious to be first — they plunged into the water waist deep as they reached the shore — the 'Stars and Stripes' were instantly floating — a rush was made for the sand hills and amid loud shouts they pressed onward."<sup>8</sup>

On March 13 he described a bombardment of the American lines by 13-inch shells from the Mexican fort:

I wish you could hear one of these huge projectiles in the air as they are coming, and see the scattering they make. The roar they make may be compared to that of a tornado, and every man within a quarter of a mile of the spot where they strike thinks they are about to fall on his individual head. The consequence is, there is a general scampering to and fro....

Although it took two men to lift each shell, Kendall told the Picayune he was planning to send one to the paper "as a sample."<sup>9</sup>

On the beaches Kendall found the American soldiers suffering from the hot sun, bad drinking water and sleeping without

tents. They were exhausted from marching in heavy sand, hampered by heavy, gusting winds from the north (Northerners), and under constant fire from the Mexican guns. The Northerners also were washing a number of the American ships up on shore, leaving the beach strewn with debris. On March 23 the Picayune correspondent was getting ready to turn in for the night at one of the rear area camps when an alarm spread the Mexican cavalry was about to charge. "The scene at the quartermaster's department was exciting and most ludicrous," Kendall wrote.<sup>10</sup> "Seven full companies of the odds and ends of the camp — wagoners, hostlers, cooks, boatmen, clerks, servants and what not — were collected and armed, and every preparation was made to annihilate the 2000 cavalry aforesaid; but not an enemy appeared and the whole affair ended in less than smoke."<sup>11</sup>

The next morning, March 24, Kendall watched as the American guns bombarded the city. "The conflagration was certainly the most grand I have ever witnessed," he reported, as fires swept the city.<sup>12</sup> The shelling continued the following morning, Kendall describing the roar as "tremendous....Every one of the guns are now keeping up an incessant firing upon the city." On March 26 at sunrise the Mexicans raised a white flag and asked for a parley. "The Mexicans will palaver until the vomito or millenium comes, if they are permitted, which I trust and feel assured will not be the case," the correspondent wrote.<sup>13</sup> It was not the case, and the next day, March 27, the battle ended. Kendall was ready almost immediately to send off the dispatches

for the Picayune: "Not knowing what vessel is to sail first, I have written duplicates of this letter to send off by any and every conveyance."<sup>14</sup> Kendall was fearful the editors would "find our letters reach you in a jumbled and confused manner" because of the disrupted shipping due to the high winds and waves that had swept the Vera Cruz harbor. More than 30 wrecked American ships were on the beaches, Kendall said.<sup>15</sup> However, he was told the steamer Princeton was going to leave as soon as the battle ended to carry Scott's official message to Washington. Kendall was waiting on the beach as a boat from the ship shoved off from the camp, and he placed the Picayune's accounts on board.<sup>16</sup> With his constant energy and attention to detail, Kendall once again had acted quickly to assure the Picayune would beat its competition with another major story.

The Picayune's Haile, meanwhile, had traveled to Vera Cruz with the Second Division troops under General Worth. Haile made the most circuitous trip to Vera Cruz of all the reporters. Freamer and Peoples had started from Monterrey with the troops, but the hard-travelling Haile had gone from New Orleans to Monterrey to rejoin Worth's division, only to find it preparing to march back up the Rio Grande to board ships bound for Vera Cruz. Desiring to remain with what he considered the army's "crack troops," Haile had made the return march with them.<sup>17</sup>

It was a fast, hard trip. Under Worth's hard pace, the distance which Haile had taken 14 days to cover, was covered in 10 days. Riding with the forwardmost unit of the division, Haile

arrived back at the mouth of the Rio Grande on January 22, "perfectly encased in a thick layer of dust." The fast trip proved somewhat unnecessary, however, as the troops had to remain in camp three weeks waiting for the ships to assemble to carry them to Vera Cruz. Haile took advantage of the break to write letters to the Picayune praising the conduct of the regular troops, and describing "disreputable conduct by some of the volunteers." The volunteers' behavior had been "too long neglected" by the press, Haile believed, but it gave him "great pain" to report it. The volunteers, he wrote, were guilty of numerous "outrages against Mexican citizens," including "robbing, assaulting the women," breaking into houses and other feats of a similar character.<sup>18</sup>

Haile advised:

Let a few of the fiends who commit (outrages) be strung up upon the nearest trees, and some of the officers who wink at such conduct be... exposed and dismissed from the service and our national honor will not often be tarnished by such gross and horrible violations....<sup>19</sup>

Haile ended comment on the subject by noting: "The man who is capable of acting like a ruffian and brute in Mexico, should be branded as a ruffian and brute when he returns home."<sup>20</sup>

The former West Pointer's feelings about the regular troops were quite different. Writing from their camp as they waited for the ships to carry them to Vera Cruz, Haile described the scene about him:

(The troops)...appear to be as gay as children. Large fires have been lighted...and they are boiling their coffee, cooking their supper, and

cracking jokes, Tattoo is now beating. Nothing is more heart stirring than the fife and drum well played. Half a dozen drums and as many fifes are now 'discoursing' merry music.<sup>21</sup>

Haile was moved by the hardships and simple life the regular troops had to endure in the army of the 1840s. "I wish some of your quiet readers, who are at this moment quietly seated at their fireplaces, with their wives and children near them, could visit this spot for a few minutes tonight," he wrote.

The noble fellows will now wrap themselves in their blankets, stretch themselves upon the ground, and whilst the cold night mist sweeps over them, dream, perhaps of their wives and children and mothers at home; of friends and homes that many of them, probably, are destined never to see.<sup>22</sup>

Haile took the moment to urge President Polk to take advantage of a new military appropriations bill about to be passed by Congress to reward the regular army; "not just those who are fortunate enough to be the sons of powerful political men." "I feel confident," Haile stated, "that Mr. Polk needs not even the promptings of the people, who have so often and so warmly expressed their desire on the subject, to induce him to elevate and encourage our little army...Tried merit, and long and zealous services will be remembered by him." Haile closed: "This Mexican War is severe on all concerned in it -- a dangerous, laborious, comfortless, and, I have some times thought, a thankless service."<sup>23</sup>

Haile arrived at Vera Cruz on March 5 with Worth's division. He had stopped briefly at Tampico en route, but did



not attempt to report from there since Lumsden and Kendall were in the city. On March 6, Haile wrote, the American fleet received a copy of a Vera Cruz newspaper which contained Santa Anna's distorted account of the battle at Buena Vista. Although the report caused "intense anxiety and excitement" aboard the ships, it generally was not believed, Haile said.<sup>24</sup> On March 7 he watched as Scott and most of the leading generals on the scene made a first-hand inspection of the landing site and the city from aboard a small steamer. When it neared the castle the ship was fired on and two shots just missed hitting it, Haile reported. "Had they sunk her," he wrote, "it would have been the greatest windfall that Mexico has been or ever will be blessed with."<sup>25</sup>

On March 9 the troops began landing, Haile describing the surf boats as "moving off in gallant style and in the most perfect order." He watched as Worth jumped out of the lead boat and led the troops onto the beach without opposition. Haile did not go ashore for several days, remaining on the Alabama until the night of March 11, when he was told the ship was about to carry dispatches back to New Orleans. "It is now time to foot up the news to this evening," he wrote that night from the ship's deck, adding, "but I must do so by only giving the outlines...because the field of operations is too extensive to allow of my gathering particulars."<sup>26</sup> Haile went on shore that night, but the next day was unable to accompany the troops. "I was prevented by circumstances from going into the field today," he explained, "but felt

the more easy about it as both Kendall and Lumsden were there."<sup>27</sup>

A storm prevented the Alabama from sailing until March 13. Haile's reports, together with Lumsden's and Kendall's reached the Picayune the night of March 24. The next day the paper's headlines announced "Investment of Vera Cruz!"<sup>28</sup> In order to print all the letters from its three correspondents, the Picayune issued a supplement "at no extra cost to the public." The paper also interviewed the captain of the ship which had carried the mail back to New Orleans and described a chart sent to it by Kendall, giving the position of the ships in Vera Cruz harbor and the troops on the beach.<sup>29</sup>

Lumsden, Kendall's Picayune partner, had fully intended not to "miss the ball at Vera Cruz,"<sup>30</sup> and had made careful arrangements to depart early for the invasion. He travelled with the command of General James Shields in the steamer New Orleans, departing from Tampico on March 7 together with Kendall. He went ashore soon after the first troops reached the beach, and spent the next two days riding across the sand hills as the Americans enlarged their beachhead. At night he stayed aboard the Sloop Albany and wrote his letters for the Picayune.<sup>31</sup> The heat and marching through the sand hills had greatly fatigued him, Lumsden reported. On March 12 he had to stay aboard the Albany all day because a sudden, severe "Norther" made landings impossible.<sup>32</sup>

Lumsden, when ashore, enjoyed scouting with the advance units of the American forces, and on one occasion participated in the capture of a Mexican soldier who was leading some horses.<sup>33</sup>

Reading of the incident, the light-hearted St. Louis Reveille put a gag headline on the item: "Farewell to the Quill!"<sup>34</sup> Lumsden's exploits soon removed him from active participation in the war's reporting, however. While on a scouting mission with some dragoons he was thrown from his horse and his leg was broken. In a letter to the Picayune, Lumsden explained but for the accident "I should have sent you many more letters."<sup>35</sup> Confined to bed, Lumsden wrote,

You would laugh could you see my position while writing. When I say I am screwed up, splintered up, bolstered up, tucked up and tied up...you can begin to imagine, though very imperfectly, what a figure I cut.<sup>36</sup>

He managed to send the paper a journal that he had kept of the siege prior to his injury, but the Picayune did not use it, explaining most of the contents had already been reported. Lumsden returned to New Orleans three weeks after the siege ended, and did not return to active reporting of the war.<sup>37</sup>

The Delta had carefully prepared to give the Picayune stiff competition in the coverage at Vera Cruz. Frenner and Peoples made arrangements to depart early to witness the assault from the beginning. Peoples left Tampico February 26, but as luck would have it he was on a slow moving schooner carrying horses and military baggage.<sup>38</sup> The ship's slow speed cost him an opportunity to report on the siege. The boat finally arrived safely, but only a few days before the city surrendered.<sup>39</sup> Frenner at first believed Peoples was already at the invasion site, and assured the Delta "Chaparral is with the advanced

troops and will keep you advised by every opportunity of their movements."<sup>40</sup> After arriving, Frenner looked for Peoples in the invading army's camp, and, unable to locate him, wrote the Delta: "Great fears are entertained for the schooner Ella, 20 days out of Tampico with (Chaparral) aboard."<sup>41</sup> Peoples' ship eventually turned up, but he had time to file only one short summary article regarding the siege.<sup>42</sup>

Frenner had much better luck. He had departed New Orleans in mid-February, and reached the navy base at Brazos Island on February 23. On shore he "found much apprehension as to the fate of Taylor" at Buena Vista.<sup>43</sup> After making arrangements to have any news of Taylor relayed to the Delta, he continued on to Tampico, arriving March 4. He found that most of the troops had already departed.<sup>44</sup> On the morning of March 7 he boarded the fast steamer New Orleans, the same ship carrying Kendall and Lumsden of the Picayune, and reached Vera Cruz on March 9, the day of the landing.<sup>45</sup> After going ashore Frenner tracked down the camp of his companions at the battle of Monterrey, the Texas Rangers.<sup>46</sup>

The second morning on the beach Frenner found himself under heavy fire from the Mexican positions; "the balls came whistling through 'as thick as hail.'"<sup>47</sup> He spent most of the day visiting the American positions, and that night wrote:

The more I see of the investment of the city of Vera Cruz the more interesting and exciting it becomes. It is, indeed, a source of pride, and at the same time of pain, to see the gallant little army of ours marching and manoeuvring

about, over the sand hills and through the chaparral.<sup>48</sup>

Despite the heat, fleas, deep sand and enemy fire, Freaner said he heard no complaints. "The air has been completely filled with sand which drifts off the sand heights," he noted. He was happy to report there was "no evidence of anything like vomito."<sup>49</sup> On March 19, after watching the start of the American bombardment of the city, he predicted it could hold out for only eight or nine days.<sup>50</sup> That night he described the replacement of American troops in nearby trenches:

The troops who returned from the entrenchments were literally covered with smoke and dust, and so much disfigured that they could not be recognized except by their voices. Shell after shell exploded in their midst, and shot after shot threw barrels of earth from the embankments over their heads as they lay in the trenches. Their escape seems to have been miraculous, indeed, and every person is surprised that at least one-half of their number was not slain.<sup>51</sup>

Freaner noted after being relieved the American gunners had immediately started a card game with "an old greasy pack" and "nothing but tobacco for stakes."<sup>52</sup>

When the Mexicans asked for a truce on March 26 Freaner expressed the same fear as Kendall had, that it was only a ruse to allow them to strengthen their positions. But when he entered the city with the first American troops the correspondent found a different situation. "The destruction of the city is most awful," he wrote. "One half of it is destroyed. Houses are blown to pieces and furniture scattered in every direction — the

streets torn up and the strongest buildings seriously damaged."<sup>53</sup>

During the siege, William C. Tobey, a former reporter for the Philadelphia North American, became established as another of the war's important correspondents. Writing under the pseudonym "John of York," Tobey followed the pattern established by Haile and Kendall in compiling diary-type reports of the events and sending them off in batches to the North American. His accounts, although not as widely reprinted as those of the New Orleans journalists, still brought recognition from other papers, and before long his writing was being described as "piquant,"<sup>54</sup> "able and patriotic"<sup>55</sup> and "of great versatility and power."<sup>56</sup>

Tobey was born in New York (date uncertain)<sup>57</sup> and had been active in Philadelphia journalism for several years before the war. He joined a Pennsylvania volunteer regiment in Fall, 1846 along with a number of other Philadelphia journalists, including Robert F. Small and Montgomery P. Young of the Public Ledger. Small and Young became occasional contributors to their paper, but their work did not reach the scale of Tobey. When he first joined the Pennsylvania unit Tobey served in a civilian capacity in the quartermaster section. However, he was allowed to participate in the regiment's fighting at Vera Cruz and Mexico City, and when the unit returned to Philadelphia in Summer, 1848 Tobey held the rank of second lieutenant.<sup>58</sup>

The North American heard regularly from Tobey during the first six months after he departed with the volunteers. The paper printed 38 letters, usually a galley in length, on 20

different dates between December 25, 1846, and June 19, 1847. His letters suddenly stopped appearing in the paper at the end of June. In November the paper referred to him as "the former contributor of army letters to our columns," but it appears he was a victim of poor mail service.<sup>59</sup> In December, 1847 the paper printed letters from Tobey dated the previous June at Puebla, explaining,

OUR ARMY CORRESPONDENCE — We yesterday received some 15 or 20 letters from Mexico, written at different dates between May and October last, by our "John of York," Mr. William C. Tobey. Where these letters have been, how delayed, and by what means they have now reached us, we can form no estimate....<sup>60</sup>

Other batches of Tobey's letters appeared unannounced in the Philadelphia paper in April and June, 1848, dated from Mexico City. After arriving in the Mexican capital in September, 1847, Tobey started a new paper there, also called the North American. (Discussed in detail in Chapter 17). His correspondence to the American paper dropped sharply after taking that assignment.

Tobey started his "John of York" letters while the Pennsylvania volunteers were still being outfitted at New Orleans. In one of his earliest articles he provided "a word for the volunteers who are yet coming from the North:"

Get your paper money, what little you have, exchanged for gold. Unless you do this, the good people of New Orleans will make you pay discount.

Get the heaviest blankets you can find....

Bring with you small packages of medicines....

Don't trouble yourselves to squander your money for Allen's revolvers, for nine-tenths of

those our men have are worse than useless.

Beware of mixing Mississippi water with whiskey, if you would not suffer terribly on your passage down the river.

Bring but little heavy clothing, but see that what you have is strong and durable. Bring besides a little book of needles and thread with extra buttons.

Buy shoes instead of boots, and have them stout and heavy soles. In wading through swamps in boots they get wet and once off your feet do not pull on very easily.

If you have room for it, get, each of you, a broad brimmed wool hat. In coming you can wear it and it will keep the hot sun from boiling your brains.

"And as a clincher," Tobey closed, "do not foolishly spend your money on the route or here, for you will want it and want for it, I can tell you."<sup>61</sup>

From New Orleans the Pennsylvania regiment sailed south to Lobos Island, north of Vera Cruz, where the army was assembling. Camped out on the island's beaches in rows of white tents, Tobey reported the volunteers were looking forward to their first combat. "This going to war, after one gets into the enemy's country," Tobey wrote, "is so full of excitement and danger, that the laziest man on the face of the great plantation known as the 'world,' would, if here, forget his penchant for afternoon siestas and morning dreams."<sup>62</sup> In a moment of reflection he wrote, "Fatalism, however mischievous in other 'professions,' is the true creed for the man who puts himself up as a target at seven dollars per month."<sup>63</sup> But, he added, "There is not a man in our regiment who volunteered for patriotic motives, but feels that he is to play a conspicuous part in the bloody drama before him --



who dreams of else than green laurels and bright honors." Regarding the more practical matter of making his daily ration of pork and beans "more agreeable," Tobey noted he was spending twice the cost of the meal in "the purchase of good things." He also took time to assure the editors at the North American "that my letters are not dictated, in matter or manner, by any one," particularly any officers. Although he had good access to facts and information regarding the Pennsylvania unit, he said, "I write altogether from personal observation -- knowing no favorite."<sup>64</sup>

Tobey went ashore at Vera Cruz during the main landing on March 9. The Pennsylvania regiment was assigned to a brigade commanded by Major General Gideon Pillow, one of the war's more controversial political generals. Together with two Tennessee volunteer units, the Pennsylvanians were assigned to occupy some hills on the south end of the American perimeter around the city. "The day was the hottest I ever made acquaintance with, and climbing over the burning sand hills which yielded and buried our feet...made the march one of great labor and fatigue," Tobey recorded. At the end of the day, as the brigade neared its objective, a unit of Mexican cavalry started firing at it. The Tennessee volunteers rushed forward, however, and quickly chased away the defenders. Tobey reported:

The Tennessee boys, old hands now at soldiering, seemed like so many unchained devils as they fired. They say screaming is half the battle, and that the red and yellow skins will run from a yell quicker than from a fire.<sup>65</sup>

During the first days of the siege, Tobey was assigned fulltime to his army duties, including standing guard at night. At one point he informed his editors, "I have been soldiering the whole time in the ranks, and could not take notes like Messrs. Kendall, Lumsden, Haile and a dozen others who have been riding from one part of the field to another...."<sup>66</sup>

This did not remain the case, however, and before long Tobey was able to visit more of the American entrenchments, writing a letter almost daily during the siege. Receiving a batch of 10 letters, the North American ran them during a three-day period in mid-April (April 15-17) under the headline:

ARMY CORRESPONDENCE  
For the North American  
History of the Siege  
Incidents, Movements and Descriptions<sup>67</sup>

To this the paper added, "From Our Own Correspondent," and commented, "His letters need no apology, but to show the inconvenience under which he writes in camp, we may state part of his letters are written in pencil and part in ink which looks like gun powder and water, while other portions bear evidence of the hurry and bustle of the field of war."<sup>68</sup> On another occasion the paper said its letters from Tobey were written on Mexican paper taken from the governor's cabinet in the palace at Vera Cruz.<sup>69</sup> Tobey also sent the editors a piece of a shell that had exploded near him in the Vera Cruz trenches. The paper noted "it is obtained in the real Yankee spirit which would break off a finger from the deMedicis or a toe from the Belvedere for a keepsake."<sup>70</sup>

Tobey explained his extensive coverage of the siege had come about because he "obtained permission to doff my knapsack" and to tour the American lines.<sup>71</sup> On March 15 he was at a sector of the American lines which came under fire from the Mexican guns. Crouching in a trench, he wrote,

But those shells — you have never heard them singing through the air under just such circumstances as I do now even while writing thus coolly. They make a most enchanting sanguinary sound. He that hears their music feels that there is death in it, but still will like it; and believe it or not, one often, when they have ceased for a time, wishes they would begin again their song of destruction.

Tobey added, "After six days listening to them, however, the first impression (of fear) wears off...."<sup>72</sup>

For several days Tobey continued his walk north along the perimeter of the American lines, noting at one point that the New Orleans correspondents had "better facilities" for reporting than he did because they had horses.<sup>73</sup> Ticks, ants and sand-flies "that poison the skin where they bite" were causing as much trouble for the "rank-and-file" he wrote, as the Mexican artillery. He also noted General Scott was "determined to preserve sobriety in the army," resulting in officers smashing several whiskey stills. "He will not have a great deal of trouble," Tobey thought of Scott's efforts, "for liquor is so dear and so bad, that few can afford to spare money and health to indulge their bacchanalian propensities."<sup>74</sup>

On the night of March 24 Tobey stood near the American

batteries as they bombarded the city, observing,

After dark the scene was awfully grand. I could follow the shells from our batteries as they went whirling round and then descended upon a roof or into the streets of the city, exploding with tremendous reverberations. Sometimes a shell would light on a stone roof and run around nearly a minute before exploding. Others would break through with a tremendous crash and burst inside. I saw one hit a large dome and pass through it. Another struck a light spire on a public building and shivered it to atoms.<sup>75</sup>

Later the same evening, as the American shelling continued, Tobey noted, "It must be getting very warm in that city." The following morning, March 25, he predicted the city would yield within 24 hours because "our batteries are utterly ruining" it. That same night a temporary truce was declared to allow the Mexicans to bury their dead. Tobey reported, "As I write multitudes are engaged in the sad office, which others may soon in their turn render them." If Philadelphians could see the death scenes "you would all turn Quakers," he wrote.<sup>76</sup>

Most of Tobey's letters dealt with the personnel and movements of the Pennsylvania volunteers. It was obvious he was not attempting to duplicate or beat the coverage of the New Orleans correspondents. Several times he noted the North American could get more specific accounts of the fighting from the New Orleans papers.<sup>77</sup> On March 27, when the city surrendered, Tobey gave a general description of the final day's action, and closed,

Duty has kept me from getting a copy of the terms of surrender, but my watchful contemporaries here, who have more time to spare, and stronger incentives to activity in collecting the

materiel of the transaction, will lay them before you through the New Orleans press, sooner perhaps than this letter will reach you.<sup>78</sup>

At the close of the siege Tobey was appointed to work in the post office in the American camp, and that may account for his Vera Cruz letters reaching the North American so quickly. The last of the batch, dated March 28, arrived in Philadelphia on April 14, the fastest delivery of any of the letters he wrote from Mexico.

On the day of the surrender, Peoples of the Delta stood with the rows of American troops outside the city's gates as the disarmed Mexican troops marched out. He wrote,

Women and children, old men and lame ones, hobbling off, preceded the column of the vanquished; and although they are, and should be, the enemies of every American, my heart bled for them. Their treachery and cruelty to our people was (sic) lost sight of in their humiliated looks, and although I was well aware that our magnanimity and respect would live but a moment in their memories, on my soul I could not help pitying them.<sup>79</sup>

"No pen can paint to you the scene that was presented, and several occasions I imagined myself in a dream," Peoples reported. Carrying a special pass from Scott, Peoples later rode into the city to view the damage from the bombardment. He noted almost every other house was flying the flag of a neutral country "fearing the voluntarios would break into them." "Bolts, bars nor walls" would prevent the volunteers from seeing the city they helped to take, Peoples said, adding the army planned to camp them "some little distance from the city" to avoid problems.<sup>80</sup>

The Philadelphia North American's Tobey was another of the reporters who watched as the Mexicans evacuated the city on March 29. "One glance would show how grossly wrong" it would be to direct the war at the Mexican people, he noted in a letter. "It would take ten years of unprofitable, wasting war to establish American authority over Mexico with any kind of permanency" if that course was followed, he said. "The field fighting would be nothing (but) the endless guerrilla system of warfare that would swallow up garrisons and beggar our treasury." The course to follow, Tobey argued, was to go after the government, although "it is difficult to see how peace is to be made with a country that has no responsible head."<sup>81</sup>

Haile also watched as the Mexican army marched out of the city, and the scene reminded him of the exodus from Monterrey which he had observed earlier. He then accompanied the first infantry companies which entered the city, reporting:

The effect of the shells upon the city was now seen, and proved to be deplorable. Hardly a house had escaped, and a large portion of them were ruined. The shells had fallen through the roofs and had exploded inside, tearing everything into pieces — bursting through the partitions and blowing out the windows.<sup>82</sup>

The next day, March 30, Haile made an inspection of the huge castle, giving the Picayune's readers a detailed description of its fortifications.

Vera Cruz marked the end of Haile's role as a reporter in the war. In April, 1847 he accepted a commission as a first lieutenant in the infantry, and at the end of May was promoted

to captain. He was named commander of a company in the newly organized 14th Infantry and spent most of Summer 1847 recruiting the men for it. His unit arrived at Vera Cruz in late August, en route to join Scott's army near Mexico City. On August 15, 1847, it fought a short but fierce engagement with a large force of Mexican irregulars at National Bridge, west of Vera Cruz, and was forced to fall back to the port city. Haile served for a time as a camp commander at Vera Cruz, made a short trip to Mexico City in December, 1847, and ended his career as a barracks commander at Baton Rouge, Louisiana. He was "honorably mustered out" of the service in July, 1848, and became editor of the Plaquemine (Louisiana) Sentinel. He died on September 10, 1849, at Indian Village, Louisiana, near Plaquemine, from the lingering results of yellow fever he had contracted while at Vera Cruz.<sup>83</sup>

Although the war continued for more than a year after Haile ended his role as a reporter, his writing was among the most extensive and thorough of the campaigns. In 11 months of active service for the Picayune he had filed more than 100 letters with the paper, covered two major battles — Monterrey and Vera Cruz — and spent many months in the various camps in southern Texas and Mexico. In addition to his straight reporting he had found time to record the "singular sights and scenes" of Mexican life, as he described it, and composed his unique "Pardon Jones" letters. He wrote from the bias of his professional military training at West Point, but this experience also

allowed him to give highly detailed and descriptive accounts of the operations, men, units and military equipment in the various engagements he witnessed. He was sympathetic towards the generals — Worth, Taylor, Scott — but also wrote impassioned descriptions and praise for the "bone and sinew who carried the muskets," to use his words. He often wrote in the elaborate, exaggerated ante-bellum style of the day, but appreciated the need to have his letters ready for the first departing express courier, in order for the Picayune to be first with the news. On occasion he showed contempt and distrust of the Mexicans, particularly their army, but he also came to realize they had customs and a culture that were suited to their own society. Overall, the quantity and quality of his reporting places him second only to Kendall as a reporter of the Mexican War.

The race to be first with the news of the victory again was close. The steamer Princeton, carrying the official government courier and the New Orleans newspaper correspondence, reached the Southwest Passage off the tip of Louisiana on April 2, 82 hours after leaving Vera Cruz. The Picayune, Evening Mercury and Delta all had arranged for expresses from there to the city, about 60 miles. Interestingly, the Evening Mercury, which did not have a regular correspondent at Vera Cruz but had arranged for reports to be sent to it, won the express race to New Orleans and had the first extra on the streets.<sup>84</sup> The Picayune, with the detailed accounts by its correspondents, soon followed.



The Delta, in spite of elaborate arrangements, was late, and had to reprint the Evening Mercury's accounts in its first editions.<sup>85</sup> Frenner had decided to personally carry back his reports on the surrender of the city. But, as the Delta later recounted, "By one of those unforeseen accidents...or misfortunes, through which the best laid plans are sometimes frustrated," he missed his connections and was late. After arriving at the mouth of the Mississippi on the Princeton, Frenner failed to get on board a smaller boat, the Adriatic, which carried the news of the victory up the river. The paper still published an extra edition, and a two-page supplement in its regular edition with his letters, which filled three-and-a-half columns. As for Frenner, the paper reported, he was "in good health and well conditioned" from his month on the Vera Cruz beaches.<sup>86</sup>

Although the New Orleans papers had the best coverage of the battle, Vera Cruz was one instance where they did not provide most of the country's papers with the first news of the victory. After the Princeton stopped to unload the New Orleans mail with the correspondents' accounts of the battle, it took the government messenger with Scott's dispatches to Pensacola. The Pensacola Gazette of April 3 had the story first in the form of an interview with the Princeton's captain. The next day the Gazette's report was reprinted in the Mobile (Alabama) Herald and Tribune. The express rider carrying copies of the Gazette and the Herald and Tribune reached Charleston April 7<sup>87</sup> and on April 10 the express reached Baltimore.<sup>88</sup> When the first extra

editions of the Sun came off the press they were made available to the city's telegraph agent, and the papers in Philadelphia, New York and Boston all had summarized reports by 9 a.m. and were able to rush out their own extra editions.<sup>89</sup> The more detailed accounts of the Picayune followed three days later.

The Baltimore Sun had been instrumental in bringing the news so rapidly to the North. Under a headline reading "UNPARALLELED EFFORT OF NEWSPAPER ENTERPRISE," the paper explained the feat had been accomplished by its pony express system, covering more than 1,000 miles. The article read in part:

We have at great expense and by a most extended effort, been enabled to hasten the transmission of this intelligence to our anxious citizens; and eminently gratifying as it is to those national feelings which we are all proud to confess, we shall find an all sufficient reward for our enterprise, in the assurance we have again enjoyed an opportunity of presenting to the people of Baltimore, and a large portion of the nation, the first details of this most important and honorable achievement of American prowess and skill.<sup>90</sup>

After opening its express packets from the South with the Pensacola and Mobile newspapers, the Sun immediately sent a telegram to the President in Washington to inform him of the victory. It was Polk's first news of the outcome. Two days later the Sun received a letter from J. Knox Walker, the President's personal secretary stating: "I am requested by the President to thank you for your obliging kindness...."<sup>91</sup> In his diary Polk recorded the telegram from the Sun "was joyful news."<sup>92</sup> Two hours later the President had a copy of the Sun, rushed to the

capital by train, and after reading the account commented, "It comes so well vouched for as to leave no doubt as to its authenticity."<sup>93</sup> Later that same night the army's official courier carrying Scott's first reports of the surrender reached Polk, and he decided to release the reports immediately to Thomas Ritchie, editor of the Washington Union, for publication.<sup>94</sup>

In the aftermath of the Vera Cruz coverage, a feud erupted in the press over the accuracy of some of the reporting from the combat areas. Kendall was at the center of the dispute, and most of the criticism came from Democratic newspapers. The Washington Union's Ritchie led the attack, obviously speaking for Polk and his administration. One Kendall paragraph in particular caused a rebuttal from the President. It read: "Only 10 mortars have landed so far -- a heavy responsibility rests with the War Department in not having the ordnance here in due season -- some 12,000 to 15,000 are completely paralyzed -- ...such is the position in which General Scott now finds himself."<sup>95</sup> Polk, already convinced the Picayune and Kendall were promoting the presidency of either Taylor or Scott, reacted quickly.<sup>96</sup>

Ritchie wrote he "had been favored with copious details from the proper department" which showed the supplies had been sent to Vera Cruz. His rebuttal defended the President, the War Department and the Ordnance and Quartermaster departments. "The public press and its correspondents," Ritchie continued, "should be more careful before it (sic) raises a suspicion or

gets up a clamor against the administration -- every member of which has faithfully done its duty in the vigorous prosecution of the war."<sup>97</sup> The dispute did not prevent the Union from reprinting the Picayune's letters, and Ritchie observed that Haile's descriptions of the amphibious landing gave "a clear and striking account."<sup>98</sup> But the seeds of discord had been planted, and as the war continued they came forth again, and resulted in a wider, hotter dispute about the correspondents and their work.

Long anticipated, Vera Cruz turned out to be the most extensively reported battle of the war. Frenner, Kendall and Lumsden all went ashore with the first wave of the invading troops, and Haile, Tobey, and later Peoples, joined in providing the eager public at home with highly detailed, descriptive accounts of the 20-day siege of the Mexican city. The press also rose to the challenge of speeding the news back to the States. The Baltimore Sun carried the news 1,000 miles by pony express to be first to inform the government and most of the nation; at the same time the New Orleans papers again conducted a hectic race to be first in that city. And, while most of the battle coverage was highly laudatory of the American activities, for the first time the press gave an indication it was going to be critical of the government if necessary. In the events that followed, the correspondents found they had a number of opportunities to apply that criticism.

## NOTES

1. Smith, op. cit., Chaps. 18, 22.
2. Ibid., II:20.
3. Ibid., Chap. 22. The battle ended on March 27, formal articles of capitulation were signed March 28, and the Americans occupied the city on March 29.
4. New Orleans Picayune, December 9, 1846.
5. Baltimore Sun, February 6, 1847.
6. Charleston Courier, March 2, 12, 1847.
7. New Orleans Picayune, March 26, 1847.
8. Ibid.
9. Quoted in Charleston Courier, April 5, 1847.
10. New Orleans Picayune, April 4, 1847.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., April 9, 1847.
16. Ibid., April 4, 1847.
17. Ibid., February 4, 1847.
18. Ibid., January 27, 1847.
19. Ibid., February 4, 1847.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid., February 5, 1847.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid., March 26, 1847.
25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid., March 25, 1847.
29. Ibid., March 26, 1847.
30. Ibid., February 20, 1847.
31. Ibid., March 26, 1847.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid., March 26, 1847.
34. St. Louis Reveille, April 6, 1847.
35. New Orleans Picayune, March 30, 1847.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid., June 11, July 11, 30, 1847.
38. New Orleans Delta, April 1, 1847.
39. Ibid., April 4, 1847.
40. Ibid., March 19, 1847.
41. Ibid., April 1, 1847.
42. Ibid., April 11, 1847.
43. Ibid., March 12, 1847.
44. Ibid., March 19, 1847.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid., April 4, 1847.
47. Ibid., March 19, 1847.
48. Ibid.
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid., April 3, 1847.
51. Ibid., April 4, 1847.
52. Ibid.

53. Ibid., April 14, 1847.
54. New Orleans Picayune , May 6, 1847.
55. St. Louis Reveille, November 17, 1847.
56. New Orleans Delta, January 2, 1848.
57. Francis B. Heitman, Historical Register and Dictionary of the U.S. Army, 1789-1903, (2 vols. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1903), I:193.
58. Ibid.
59. Philadelphia North American, November 15, 1847.
60. Ibid., December 6, 1847.
61. Ibid., January 18, 1847.
62. Ibid., March 19, 1847.
63. Ibid. Seven dollars a month was a private's pay at the time.
64. Ibid.
65. Ibid., April 9, 1847.
66. Ibid., Also see April 15, 1847, for comments about the New Orleans reporters.
67. Ibid., April 15, 1847.
68. Ibid., April 9, 1847. Also see January 18, 1847, for comments on the hardships under which Tobey wrote his letters from camp.
69. Ibid., May 13, 1847.
70. Ibid., May 20, 1847.
71. Ibid., April 15, 1847.
72. Ibid.
73. Ibid.
74. Ibid., April 16, 1847.
75. Ibid.

76. Ibid.
77. Ibid., April 17, 1847.
78. Ibid.
79. New Orleans Delta, April 11, 1847.
80. Ibid.
81. Philadelphia North American, April 17, 1847.
82. New Orleans Picayune, April 9, 1847.
83. Ibid., September 16, 1849.
84. Charleston Courier, April 10, 1847.
85. New Orleans Delta, April 4, 1847.
86. Ibid.
87. Charleston Courier, April 8, 1847.
88. Baltimore Sun, April 10, 1847.
89. Washington Union, April 12, 1847.
90. Baltimore Sun, April 10, 1847.
91. Ibid., April 12, 1847.
92. Quaife, Polk Diary, op. cit., II:465.
93. Ibid.
94. Ibid. Also see Union, April 10, 1847.
95. Washington Union, April 9, 1847.
96. Ibid., April 16, 1847; Quaife, Polk Diary, op. cit., II:236.
97. Washington Union, April 9, 1847.
98. Ibid., April 1, 16, 1847.



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## CHAPTER 12

### MR. BEACH AND MRS. STORMS

As the Vera Cruz campaign was coming to a close, one of the war's more quixotic chapters involving the press also came to a close. The incident involved Moses Yale Beach, colorful owner of the New York Sun, and Jane McManus Storms, an outspoken advocate of Manifest Destiny who for several years had been writing articles for the Sun on foreign policy and Washington politics.

Their role in the war started in November, 1846 when Beach convinced President Polk and Secretary of State James Buchanan to send him to Mexico City on a secret peace mission. Beach had been a strong supporter of the war from the start, and openly and aggressively advocated annexing all of Mexico. In an editorial in October, 1846 he had urged the government to send an army immediately to take Mexico City, calling it "of the highest importance."<sup>1</sup> At a later point in the conflict he predicted the next president of the United States would be the "prominent man of either party who comes out for the occupation of all of Mexico, the purchase of Cuba and replacement of the present rotten and useless Navy."<sup>2</sup>

In Autumn, 1846 Beach became convinced the time was ripe for peace after he and Catholic Bishop John Hughes of New York City received messages from Texas contacts that the Mexicans were sending out peace feelers.<sup>3</sup> Hughes urged Beach to notify government authorities before publishing his information, and the publisher agreed to the suggestion. As a result Buchanan invited Beach to Washington to discuss the reports. At the capital, Polk and his secretary of state listened with interest to Beach's belief a mission to Mexico might bring peace, not the least because it coincided with the administration's hopes the war could be ended early.<sup>4</sup> Beach's son later wrote that Polk and Buchanan had agreed with Beach's contention personal conferences with leading Mexican government and church officials could end the war. They reportedly urged the New York editor-businessman to "accept the duty personally," and he agreed.<sup>5</sup>

Another Washington official impressed with Beach's proposal was Nicholas P. Trist, the State Department head clerk who five months later went to Mexico with the President's official peace proposal. In a letter to Mrs. Storms, dated November 24, 1846, Trist reported, "The prophet (Mr. Beach) was to see me.... Is he not a wonderful man? And in more than one respect, too. Was there ever such a hoper before?" Was there ever such a clearer statement of Manifest Destiny?, Trist might have asked, for in the next sentence he explained the "rational principles" upon which Beach hoped the war would be ended:

(Occupy and annex Mexico, or so much of it as is needful to secure a direct route to the Pacific, for the good of the world.) They are rational principles though; and they must go on gaining ground until we occupy the whole of it;....<sup>6</sup>

Trist closed his letter, however, predicting this would not happen in their lifetime.

Polk and Buchanan apparently were convinced enough to try it and the secretary of state made arrangements to have Beach appointed as a confidential agent of the State Department.<sup>7</sup> The mission called for Beach to go to Mexico City to sound out peace sentiment, and to seek a settlement if he found any opportunities. In return, as his broker's fee, Beach was to receive the right of transit across the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, which was a possible Atlantic-Pacific canal route. Beach also hoped to win a banking concession in Mexico City. (Among Beach's business activities in New York were several small banks.) Whether Beach personally intended to become involved in development of such a canal is not clear. Historian Frederick Merk speculates Beach probably had in mind selling his rights for a profit at a later date, or interesting others in its actual construction.<sup>8</sup>

Buchanan, in a careful set of instructions, informed Beach of the minimum peace terms he was to seek. The nature of his mission was to be kept confidential, he was warned. The only person to be informed, if necessary, was John Black, the American consul in Mexico City. If Beach had any messages to transmit to the government he was to go only through Black, who would transmit them to the U.S. naval commander off Vera Cruz for forwarding

to Washington. His cover story throughout was to be that he was on a business trip. In conclusion, Buchanan explained, the government would pay Beach six dollars a day for his services, plus travel expenses.<sup>9</sup> The President, Buchanan told Beach, "has full confidence in your patriotism, ability and discretion....," adding, "The trust thus confided to you is one of great delicacy and importance."<sup>10</sup>

Returning to New York to complete preparations, Beach met again with Bishop Hughes, who supplied him with introductions to Cuban and Mexican church leaders. To conceal his mission further, Beach decided to travel to Mexico by way of Havana.<sup>11</sup> As a further concealment he took along his 26-year-old daughter and Mrs. Storms, who was to be his assistant and interpreter since she spoke fluent Spanish and was an active Catholic.

Jane McManus Storms, then 39, was a well known writer, publicist and political activist in her own right.<sup>12</sup> She had become interested in the development of Texas and the Southwest in the early 1830s when her father joined other New York and New England capitalists to form the Galveston Bay and Texas Land Company. She made several trips to Texas on business for her father, but finally settled in New York City in 1839 and became an active publicist for expansion and annexation of Texas. During her journalistic career she contributed articles to the Sun, New York Herald, the New York Tribune, Washington (D.C.) States and John L. O'Sullivan's pro-expansionist Democratic Review (it was this publication which first used the term

Manifest Destiny in an 1845 editorial.)<sup>13</sup>

She was a well known, if somewhat controversial, figure in Washington by the start of the war. Senator Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri, who had opposed a war with Mexico until it actually began, said he had grown tired of her "masculine stomach for war and politics."<sup>14</sup> After receiving an outspoken letter regarding the war from her in July, 1846, Navy Secretary George Bancroft asked War Secretary William L. Marcy, "Who is Storms?" (The letter had been signed, simply, "Storms.") "She is an outrageously smooth and keen writer for the newspapers in N.Y.," Marcy replied.<sup>15</sup> She apparently had won the support of Buchanan and others in Washington, and was well known to government officials under her pseudonyms "Montgomery" and "Cora Montgomery."<sup>16</sup>

The trio left New York City in late November, taking a circuitous route to Havana, first sailing to Charleston, where they transferred to a small schooner which took them to Matanzas, on the north coast of Cuba. From there they caught a regularly scheduled coastal steamer which took them to Havana. Beach spent several weeks in the Cuban city meeting with church officials, seeking to set up contacts in Mexico City and arranging for British passports for his party. Beach's son later said this precaution was taken after the publisher had been warned "not to trust his life without the protection of a passport...of a nation with whom Mexico was at peace."<sup>17</sup> However, it seems more likely

Beach was attempting to extend his cover story of being only a businessman on a visit. At any rate, the British consul gave him a temporary appointment "as bearer of dispatches for the consul."<sup>18</sup>

If Beach intended his trip to Mexico to be a secret he failed to count on the efficiency of the New Orleans correspondents at Havana. The Picayune carefully reported his arrival and departure. On January 9 its Havana correspondent "Amigo" noted Beach had left for Mexico on a British steamer "with his wife and daughter."<sup>19</sup> As a further complication, on the steamer he met a former Mexican government diplomat who had known Beach for many years in New York City. The publisher tried to explain away his trip as an effort to extend his private banking interests to the Mexican capital, but he was not sure if his old acquaintance accepted the story. At Vera Cruz the Mexican authorities were highly suspicious of Beach's intentions. They apparently had received a warning from an agent in Havana and the party was delayed for three days for questioning. They finally were allowed to proceed, but at Perote, on the road to the capital, the delay and search occurred again.<sup>20</sup> Finally on January 23 or 24 Beach and the two women reached Mexico City.<sup>21</sup> They settled into a suite of rooms, and Beach began a series of meetings with civilian and church officials.

Beach had arrived at the Mexican capital at an unusual moment. Santa Anna, the only real political force in the country because he commanded the army, was in the north preparing to

fight Taylor's forces at Buena Vista. The political blocs in the capital were in a constant state of flux; Beach was surprised to find interest in his business proposals among church and anti-church forces. As part of the internal power struggle, on February 4 the government passed new regulations greatly adding to the church's war taxes.<sup>22</sup> The church resisted, and several weeks of stalemate against the government decree followed. Believing it was an opportunity to bring an early peace, Beach urged the clerics to resort to armed rebellion. On February 27 several National Guard units revolted against the government, demanding an annulment of the "anti-religious laws."<sup>23</sup> Fighting broke out and skirmishing continued intermittently in the streets of Mexico City during the next three weeks. At one point Beach supplied \$40,000 from his own funds to help pay the salaries of the pro-church troops.<sup>24</sup> So Beach's peace mission to Mexico had now come to an unusual state of affairs: while the main Mexican army was in the north fighting Zachary Taylor's forces, and a smaller Mexican army was at Vera Cruz resisting Winfield Scott's siege of the city, the New York newspaper publisher was in the Mexican capital financing a civil war at the rear of both forces.

Later, in a report to the State Department, Beach explained he supported the rebellion in order to divert the troops at the capital from marching to the support of Vera Cruz. The expense and action were "justified," he told Buchanan, because more than 5,000 Mexican troops were tied down by the



civil war for 23 days.<sup>25</sup> The rebellion ended abruptly on March 22 when Santa Anna returned from the north. (The Mexican general had been repulsed by Taylor at Buena Vista, but at the time the Mexican government had the impression Santa Anna had won, and he quickly took power.) The next day Beach received an invitation from Santa Anna to meet him at the National Palace, and unaware of the message's implications, was preparing to go there when Black, the American representative, arrived. Black, realizing Beach was about to be arrested, urged the publisher to flee at once. Leaving his baggage behind as a ruse, Beach and his daughter departed that night for Tampico, which was not the usual route to the coast. Black had been correct about Santa Anna's intentions, and a \$1,000 reward was announced for Beach's apprehension. The ruse had worked, however, and after a 10-day trip the Beaches reached the American garrison at Tampico. Within a few days a government ship took them down the coast to meet Scott at Vera Cruz.<sup>26</sup>

Mrs. Storms, meanwhile, had been involved in some adventures of her own. During the trip she had written a number of letters, signed "Montgomery," to the Sun describing political events in Mexico and urging that the country "be transferred under the wing of the United States."<sup>27</sup> On March 8 she wrote to the Sun from Mexico City, describing the events of the civil war. "Was ever a nation so determined on suicide?" she asked, referring to the fighting of a civil war while being invaded from two directions. "The treasury is the god of these military adventures

and they have no creed, doctrine or party beyond the simple belief and practice that the people were created to be plundered," she wrote. Surveying the countryside around the Mexican capital, she observed, "It cannot in any sense be looked upon as a strong position...the city could be reduced to terms in a week." In reference to the fighting in the streets, she noted, "(Mexico) is not true to herself, and even at this hour, she is doing more for the generals of the United States than they can do for themselves." In conclusion, she argued these events would leave Mexico "more than ready to receive an American government."<sup>28</sup>

When news reached Mexico City that Scott had started his assault at Vera Cruz, Beach asked Mrs. Storms to undertake a difficult mission. The American general had to be notified of the events at the Mexican capital, and she would be the best person to take the message. Traveling by stage coach the 200 miles to the coast, she reached the American lines on March 20. Scott, a stern, formal person, is reported to have been disturbed to find an American woman in the battle area, and at first doubted her information. Beach's son later wrote that Scott "uttered an epithet regarding her, which, had it found its way to the public press, would have become not less a by-word than was, at that very time, the general's 'hasty plate of soup'" statement.<sup>29</sup> Scott finally relented and she provided him with information about the civil war, the peace possibilities and conditions on the Vera Cruz to Mexico City route. The general,

however, still had his reservations about a woman taking part in such affairs, and when Beach arrived Scott is reported to have cautioned him against sending important messages "by a plenipotentiary in petticoats."<sup>30</sup>

For her part Mrs. Storms continued to write letters to the Sun regarding conditions in Mexico. On the day Scott's forces occupied Vera Cruz, March 29, she wrote, "Now it is that the United States had to decide whether it will save or destroy the last hope of the Mexican people." The need, she said, was for America to "act with firmness and liberality" to accept various portions of Mexico into the Union in order to preserve the freedom of Mexico's "long suffering and hardly-treated working classes." Such a plan would include, she noted, "a full and assured right of way" for the United States to build a canal or railroad across the Tehuantepec Isthmus.<sup>31</sup>

Returning to New York, Mrs. Storms continued her writing in support of the war and annexation of Mexico. In January, 1848 she became the editor of La Verdad, a New York-based newspaper which supported a revolutionary movement in Cuba and "the general interests of republicanism on the American continent."<sup>32</sup>

Beach left Vera Cruz for Washington in early April. Enroute he spent several days visiting the New Orleans editors, delivering their mail and newspapers from Vera Cruz. He also took the opportunity to discuss Mexican affairs with them. The day after his visit to the Delta the paper wrote:

A greater power than Manifest Destiny...has assumed the control of the fortunes of the people of Mexico...and (is pulling them toward) incorporation into the Republic of the Stars and Stripes....Do what we will, and do what they will, the result of the present position of affairs is inevitable.<sup>33</sup>

Beach continued to Washington to report to Buchanan and the State Department on his mission.<sup>34</sup> On May 11 he had a long conference with Polk regarding the affairs in Mexico, and the President, making a notation that night in his diary, observed, "He gave me valuable information."<sup>35</sup> The publisher's secret peace mission had come to an end.

## NOTES

1. Quoted in New Orleans Delta, November 11, 1846.
2. Ibid., August 12, 1847.
3. M.S. Beach, "A Secret Mission to Mexico," Scribner's Monthly XVIII (May, 1879) pp. 136-140.
4. Merk, Manifest Destiny and Mission..., op. cit., p. 132.
5. Beach, "Secret Mission," op. cit., p. 137.
6. Ibid., p. 138.
7. Merk, op. cit., p. 133.
8. Ibid., p. 132.
9. John Bassett Moore, ed., The Works of James Buchanan (New York: Antiquarian Press, Ltd., 1960) VII:119-120.
10. Ibid.
11. Beach, "Secret Mission," op. cit., p. 137.
12. For biographical information on Jane McManus Storms see Edward T. James, ed., Notable American Women, 1607-1950. (3 vols. Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971), I:315-17; Walter P. Webb, ed., The Handbook of Texas, (2 vols., Austin: The Texas State Historical Assn., 1952) II: 122; Edward S. Wallace, Destiny and Glory (New York: Coward-McCann, 1957) Chap. XII; obituaries in New York Tribune, December 31, 1878, New York Sun, January 2, 1879.
13. See Julius W. Pratt, "John L. O'Sullivan and Manifest Destiny," New York History, XIV (July, 1933) 3:213-234.
14. Notable American Women, op. cit., II:316.
15. Merk, op. cit., pp. 200-1.
16. Wallace, op. cit., Chap. XII.
17. Beach, "Secret Mission," op. cit., p. 138.
18. Ibid.
19. New Orleans Picayune, January 14, 20, 1847.
20. Beach, "Secret Mission," op. cit., pp. 138-9.

21. Smith, op. cit., II:12.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid., II:13.
24. Ibid., II:331.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid., II:14; Beach, "Secret Mission," op. cit., p. 140.
27. Letters signed "Montgomery" appeared in the New York Sun January 20, April 15, 19, 1847, from Havana, Mexico City and Vera Cruz.
28. New York Sun., April 15, 1847.
29. Beach, "Secret Mission," op. cit., p. 139.
30. Ibid., p. 140; Wallace, op. cit., pp. 246-8, gives a more positive version of the meeting.
31. New York Sun., April 19, 1847.
32. Ibid., January 8, 1848; Notable American Women, op. cit., I:316.
33. New Orleans Delta, April 23, 1847.
34. Smith, op. cit., II:331.
35. Quaife, Polk Diary, op. cit., III:22.

## CHAPTER 13

### BATTLE OF CERRO GORDO

Winfield Scott did not tarry long on the beaches of Vera Cruz to celebrate his victory. His main fear was that the vomito (yellow fever) season would set in before he could move his troops to the higher and healthier interior. His haste to move, and a decision by Santa Anna to try to block him, soon brought the two armies together again, this time at Cerro Gordo. It was a bold move by Santa Anna, who had lost to Taylor at Buena Vista in February and had to put down an insurrection at Mexico City in March. But by mid-April he had positioned his army in a highly strategic mountain position along the National Highway through which the Americans had to pass on their march to the interior. Again the Mexicans had the numerical advantage. But, as happened so often in the war, the Americans outflanked them, and in a two-day struggle, April 17-18, 1847, routed the defenders. The defeat was so complete that Santa Anna was forced to retreat all the way to Mexico City, and Scott quickly followed up his advantage by occupying the inland cities of Jalapa, Perote and Puebla, the latter but 75 miles from the capital.<sup>1</sup>

A major battle so soon after the fall of Vera Cruz had not been anticipated by the American press. But the printers

accompanying Scott's army were busy in their usual preoccupation — they had quickly started another war paper. As soon as fighting ended at Vera Cruz, John Peoples ("Chaparral" of the Delta) made an arrangement with Scott to establish an American paper, but one which differed somewhat from those started at Corpus Christi, Matamoros and Tampico. The Vera Cruz American Eagle was to assist the army commander "in the promulgation of his orders, and in the establishment of good order and the government of the city."<sup>2</sup> It was to be, in Peoples' words, "the army paper." Peoples later explained, "Although the idea was original, to follow our...army with a press...the services rendered were not without...advantage to the army." Scott apparently agreed, and Peoples, working with various combinations of the other printers following the army, operated semi-official papers with Scott's patronage at Vera Cruz, Jalapa, Puebla and Mexico City over the next 14 months.<sup>3</sup>

Associated with Peoples in the Vera Cruz paper were J.R. Barnard and William Jewell, formerly of the Tampico Sentinel. Moving quickly into the captured city, Barnard, Peoples and Jewell were able to find a print shop at 35 Las Damas Street, a block from the city's plaza.<sup>4</sup> It had been the office of the Vera Cruz Locomotor.<sup>5</sup> In their first issue on April 3 they printed Scott's official letters and documents regarding the city's surrender, and the response of the Mexican garrison commander. The items were widely reprinted by American newspapers.<sup>6</sup> Their second paper three days later carried the list of American dead



and wounded in the siege, and this too was widely reprinted.<sup>7</sup>

The Eagle was so popular with the American troops that it published four times in its first week of operation.<sup>8</sup> "We must acknowledge our friends stepped forward nobly in aid of our efforts," the Eagle stated on April 10. "The Yankees are a great people and must continue so whilst they sustain the independent press of their country," the Eagle said. It added, "Two weeks ago the presses and types we possess at this time were hurling forth invectives at the United States... (but the type has been taught) to chronicle nothing but what is American to the backbone."<sup>9</sup>

Such a valuable source of news soon was receiving wide praise in the States. The Picayune noted, "These gentlemen deserve much credit for their enterprise."<sup>10</sup> The Charleston Courier called the trio "enterprising pioneers of the press."<sup>11</sup> After receiving the first issue the New Orleans Delta commented, "From the first specimen...we augur much for its success and popularity."<sup>12</sup> In addition to the military items the Eagle also carried Vera Cruz city items, advertisements of the American merchants in the Mexican port, and poetry by Mrs. Ann Chase, the wife of the American collector at Tampico.<sup>13</sup> Peoples and Barnard later left the paper to go with the army. At the end of June, with the onset of the summer heat and yellow fever season, Jewell announced the Eagle was suspending publication until the end of September.<sup>14</sup> However, it never resumed.

When the siege was over, life for the reporters had

quickly returned to normal. Kendall wrote that the weather was excessively hot until midday, when a sea breeze usually tempered "the fierce rays of the sun." There were also swarms of flies and mosquitos to contend with. Additionally, Kendall said, "there is a rascally Mexican watchman immediately under our windows, who every half hour shouts out in most doleful cadence 'Hail, Mary most pure, it is 2 o'clock and the night is clear or cloudy,' as the case may be." In a serious, straightforward manner Kendall added, "All of this information is excessively ill-timed....The hints he has received will have a tendency to induce him to change his beat."<sup>15</sup>

Kendall was not inactive very long. Word soon came to the city that Santa Anna was positioning an army in the mountains to the northwest in an effort to block Scott's advance. Kendall left Vera Cruz the night of April 13 to catch up with the forward units. The injured Lumsden notified the Picayune that their colleague was on the road again, adding, "Shut up as I am in my room I cannot know much of what is going on."<sup>16</sup> Riding with Kendall was his special courier, Charles M. Bugbee. Kendall reached General Worth's headquarters that same night, and found that the American troops had "suffered incredibly" on their march due to "excessive heat and fatigue." The correspondent also discovered a messenger had arrived from the forward unit with the news Santa Anna was dug in in front of them with 15,000 troops. Taking notice of Santa Anna's move, and the increasing guerrilla raids, Kendall observed, "The Mexicans are playing a bloody and

at the same time bolder game than is usual for them."<sup>17</sup>

Kendall and Bugbee continued riding along with various American units, as they advanced up the highway towards Santa Anna's reported position. On April 16 Kendall reached the small town of Plan del Rio, three miles from Cerro Gordo. "I find all excitement and bustle here," he reported after visiting the Americans' assembling area.<sup>18</sup> With the main Mexican army to their front, and guerrilla bands to the rear, Kendall explained: "The road is now so much infested by small parties of the enemy that it is deemed imprudent for a single man to start, let him be ever so well mounted."

On April 17, the opening day of the battle, Kendall accompanied Colonel James Duncan and other officers to view the fighting. Returning to camp at 5 p.m. the same day he recorded, "I have just returned from the scene of conflict and a bloody one it has been...."<sup>19</sup> He gave a summary of the day's events, concluding, the Americans "will have warm work tomorrow, if the Mexicans stand up as they did today." Kendall assured the Picayune editors he would relay reports of the battle as quickly as possible, "although one has little time or convenience in the chaparral for writing."<sup>20</sup>

By the next afternoon, April 18, the Americans had routed the Mexican defenders. Kendall led off his letter that night:

The American arms have achieved another glorious and most brilliant victory. Out-numbering Gen. Scott's force materially, and occupying positions which looked impregnable as Gibraltar, one after another of their works

have been taken today, five generals, colonels enough to command ten such armies as ours, and other officers innumerable, have been taken prisoners, together with 6000 men, and the rest of their army driven and routed with the loss of everything, ammunition, cannon, baggage train, all.<sup>21</sup>

"I write this in great haste, with noise, confusion and everything else around me," Kendall continued. After giving a short summary of the day's major movements he closed, "No time to say another word. I send this off by an express."<sup>22</sup> The next day he had time to expand on the events of the battle. "I write this amid confusion of all kinds and with no other table than knees," Kendall related. His letter read in part:

The Mexican loss upon the heights was awful — the ground in places is covered with the dead!...Their loss in the retreat was terribly severe — every by-path is strewn with the dead. Had our dragoons been able to reach them in season, all would have been killed or captured.

.....  
I cannot now recollect one-tenth part of the instances of almost reckless daring displayed, but shall endeavor to pick them up...at present it is almost impossible to get hold of anything.<sup>23</sup>

After dispatching his first reports to Vera Cruz, Kendall left the battle area on April 20 and rode forward to Jalapa, where the main American units had stopped after the rout. He spent the next week interviewing army personnel, assembling a recap of the two-day battle and a detailed list of the killed and wounded, which he pieced together by visiting the headquarters of various units. These followup reports appeared in the Picayune May 6-7. Exhausted from his work during and after the fighting, the

Picayune editor took some time to take care of his own creature comforts. He visited Jalapa's bath-house, and reported,

The bath-house is situated in a romantic garden, and the rooms are none of your little cooped-up places, redolent of steam and mildew, but large and airy, furnished with couches and all appropriate furniture, and neatly got up in every way. I have some idea of trying to hire one for a sleeping apartment.<sup>24</sup>

The city apparently appealed to Kendall. He remained there for a month following the battle, sending a steady stream of correspondence to the Picayune. From April 16, the day preceding Cerro Gordo, to May 21 he sent the paper 28 stories (letters) plus the detailed list of the killed and wounded. The Picayune had so much news arriving from its correspondents at this time that on several occasions it printed two-page supplements to its regular editions containing only Mexican news. The Charleston Courier's New Orleans correspondent observed these issues were enough reading to fill the whole day, "but it is a kind of reading that never seems to tire."<sup>25</sup>

The Delta, meanwhile, was not faring as well. Since he had returned to New Orleans after Vera Cruz fell, James Frenner ("Mustang") was not with the army when it started to move inland, and missed the battle at Cerro Gordo. Frenner was not able to return to the war zone until May 7, long after the fighting.<sup>26</sup>

Peoples, however, under his popular pseudonym "Chaparral," covered the battle for the New Orleans paper. Peoples was still in Vera Cruz on April 13 when he heard Twiggs' advance guard had skirmished with enemy forces at Cerro Gordo. The reporter went

to Worth's Veracruz headquarters as soon as he heard the news, but found the general had just left for the front. In a hurried letter to the Delta Peoples stated his belief Santa Anna wanted peace, but predicted, "A terrible battle will be fought at Cerro Gordo." Peoples closed, "If I can buy, beg or borrow a horse I will leave for (the front) at daylight (and) will endeavor to make up for lost time."<sup>27</sup> His efforts to reach the front in time for the battle were successful, and he witnessed the fighting in the central area where Tennessee volunteers under General Gideon Pillow suffered heavy casualties.<sup>28</sup>

The Mexican retreat from Cerro Gordo intrigued Peoples, as had the one from Vera Cruz. He wrote a detailed account of paroled prisoners as they marched in "admirable disorder" from the battlefield in a column which stretched for more than five miles. Peoples rode alongside the straggling masses as they moved slowly towards Jalapa, weaving his horse back and forth "to avoid riding them down." He wrote,

I felt much interested in the numerous camp women -- those devoted creatures who follow them through good and evil -- and it grieved me to see them, worn down with fatigue, moving at a snail's pace, with their heavy burdens almost weighing them to the earth....These women, like the Indians, are the slaves of the men -- a slavery they submit to under the all-powerful influence of affection. In addition to their bedding and wearing apparel, they pack upon their backs the food and utensils to cook it in, and worn out as they are by the toils of the day, whilst their husband or lover sleeps, they prepare his repast.<sup>29</sup>

Further down the road Peoples came to the site where Worth's dragoons had caught up with the Mexicans retreating from the battle. "The road was lined with dead Mexicans and horses," he wrote. "They lay thick around and a more horrible scene would be difficult to picture....some (were) resting up against trees, others with legs and arms extended, and occasionally with a lancer laying with his arm upon the charger that received his death wound from the same volley that ended the career of his rider."<sup>30</sup> Arriving at the army's headquarters at Jalapa, Peoples tried to piece together a list of the American killed and wounded. "The list is much larger than first reported," he wrote, describing the difficulties he was having getting correct figures. "The alterations in some of the reports plays the devil with what I have."<sup>31</sup>

Peoples had another reason for wanting to arrive at Jalapa so quickly after the fighting. He and his partner Barnard were anxious to get another camp newspaper under way. Interestingly, some of the most graphic reporting of the battle first appeared in their new paper. It was called the American Star and started on April 25. And once again it was Peoples who did the writing. The Picayune used long portions of Peoples' account from the Star, calling it "the most connected history of the events...we have seen yet."<sup>32</sup> In addition to Peoples' account of the battle, the first edition carried a number of Scott's official orders. The Jalapa Star continued until May 13, when the owners announced they were going forward with the troops

to Puebla and "ultimately to the city of Mexico."<sup>33</sup> The Picayune reported Jewell, Barnard and Peoples had decided to dissolve their association "by mutual consent." Jewell was going to continue the operation of the American Eagle at Vera Cruz, the New Orleans paper stated, while Peoples and Barnard were transferring the Star to Puebla.<sup>34</sup>

Despite Peoples' ability to get newspapers started quickly, the Picayune's careful planning and enterprise once more resulted in its beating its competitors with the Cerro Gordo story. As soon as he had completed his accounts, Kendall gave them to Charles Bugbee, the express rider who had accompanied him from Vera Cruz. Bugbee set off immediately for the port city, evading several guerrilla bands on the six-hour, 50-mile trip.<sup>35</sup> When it read of Bugbee's exploit in delivering the Cerro Gordo reports, the Philadelphia North American said in an understatement, "Running expresses through Mexico is no easy or pleasant business."<sup>36</sup> At Vera Cruz he boarded the steamer McKim on April 20. Ten days later, as the ship slowly made its way up the Mississippi, Bugbee left it, obtained a horse, and rode the final 30 miles into the city. The paper quickly put Kendall's letters into type and issued an extra edition the same day. The Picayune also stated two government officials, carrying Scott's official reports to Washington, "furnished all the information that was desired of them."<sup>37</sup>

After viewing the battle, Peoples had arranged for an express to carry his accounts back to the Eagle at Vera Cruz,



and a second set on to the Delta in New Orleans. The express rider arrived in Vera Cruz the morning of April 20, and the Eagle spent the day setting his letters in type for an extra edition. Dated "April 20 Midnight," it was on the streets that night.<sup>38</sup> The Delta's express once again ran slightly behind the Picayune's and the Delta did not get the news onto New Orleans streets until several hours after its competitor.<sup>39</sup> Peoples' main letter to the Delta ran only six inches and was a general summary. The Delta supplemented this by reprinting Peoples' longer account in the Eagle and with five letters from an army officer identified only as "L.S.B.," also summarizing the events.<sup>40</sup> Peoples continued to supply the Delta with regular correspondence from Puebla until he returned to Vera Cruz on May 8. Frenner meanwhile had arrived from New Orleans the day before and took over the main Delta reporting assignment.<sup>41</sup>

The Picayune was once again the main source of the news for the rest of the country. The Picayune's extra of April 30 reached Mobile May 1 and Charleston May 4. There was a mixup with the U.S. mails at Charleston, which delayed the news there. The Charleston Courier explained, "The mail boat did not arrive (May 4) preventing our friends of the press who are associated with us at the north from availing themselves of the advantage of the express which has been established at such great cost and trouble."<sup>42</sup> The express also faltered on another route. The Augusta Chronicle and Sentinel, which did not publish the news until May 6, stated: "Owing to the most culpable negligence and

carelessness in the post office at Montgomery (Alabama), our enterprise of expressing important news from the seat of war 24 hours in advance of the mail was entirely failed in reference to Cerro Gordo. The letters containing the news were detained 24 hours at Montgomery...and came in the regular mail...."<sup>43</sup>

For the first time since the opening days of the war the telegraph also managed to beat the ponies to the North with the news. On April 21 the line had been extended from Washington to Fredericksburg, Virginia, 60 miles to the south. A copy of the Picayune's April 30 extra reached Fredericksburg on the morning of May 7, and the news was relayed immediately to Washington, Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York and Boston. Many papers in those cities had extras on the street by noon.<sup>44</sup> The express, with the fuller account, was close behind. After rushing out an extra the morning of May 7 with the summary off the telegraph, the Washington Union reported two pony express deliveries: the first sent by the Charleston Courier containing its extracts from the Picayune of April 30, soon followed by a second messenger dispatched by the Picayune editors with a complete copy of their April 30 edition.<sup>45</sup>

William C. Tobey, the Philadelphia North American's "John of York," after sending one of the most complete reports on Vera Cruz, missed the fighting at Cerro Gordo. He had been assigned to helping establish the American post office facilities in the captured port city, and remained behind several days after the Pennsylvania volunteer units pulled out. In a letter to the

Philadelphia paper Tobey observed, "It is said to be the hardest thing in the world for 'geniuses' to write without pay...but in my way of thinking it is more difficult for an army correspondent to make up a readable letter when there is no fighting."<sup>46</sup>

Time now hung heavy on Tobey. The temperature in Vera Cruz passed 100 degrees every day. And he was broke. He did not go to the opening of the American theater there, he explained, "for the price of admission (\$1) is not picked up easily." With more time he started writing poetry, interspersing it in his letters, with themes such as "Good Bye to Lobos," "Marching to Jalapa," and "The Wounded Soldier," "If you think them worth printing," he said in one letter to the paper, then "I don't care a fig" about what "some hypercritical gentlemen" may say of them. "I am too far off to be reached even by a 'paper bullet.'"<sup>47</sup>

Tobey also started writing about human nature in his letters, and was critical of both Mexicans and Americans. In one article he said:

They are a queer people, these Mexacanos (sic); very different from the idea one would form of them by reading their newspapers and pronunciamientos of their military chieftans. The mass are ignorant, indolent, barbarous, treacherous and superstitious; given to thieving, cheating, lying and most other accomplishments that adorn civilized as well as savage humanity; though, if anything, "a little more so."<sup>48</sup>

Regarding the American troops, particularly the volunteers, Tobey was equally harsh, writing,

The harsh treatment and privations the men are subjected to soon makes one callous to all but his own feelings and interests. I daily

witness painful spectacles of human degradation and selfishness that before seemed impossible to our nature. Men we have known at home as generous to prodigality, become, here, the most narrowminded, sordid, hoggish (If you will allow the word,) creatures imaginable; yet, vice versa, some who was accounted of no great moment at home, turn up bright sides and astonish us as much by their liberality as do others by their cupidity.<sup>49</sup>

Tobey finally left Vera Cruz on April 21, travelling with a small convoy taking mail and money to the Pennsylvania volunteers. He carried two revolvers and a carbine for protection. They were necessary he explained: "If a soldier straggles ten rods away from the train, the lasso is around his neck and the knife to his throat before he can make an alarm."<sup>50</sup> The group reached the forward camps on the night of April 23, but Tobey found he had trouble sleeping there because of the "millions of fleas and sand ticks."<sup>51</sup> The next morning he visited the army's field hospitals to see injured friends, and in the afternoon finally reached the battlefield. He was shocked at the strength of the positions which the Mexicans had held, and lost.<sup>52</sup>

The battle I knew had been fought and won by our troops; yet, it seemed, in its bare, still reality, a dream. I could not shake off this feeling as I rode along the enemy's lines of entrenchments, entered dismantled forts and, magazines, and looked from his chosen heights upon the paths up which our troops rushed into the jaws of death.

"I never desire to visit another such field after battle," Tobey wrote, referring to the still visible scenes of death.

While the fight is raging men can look upon death and shrink not from his bloody features;

but to walk coldly over hundreds of human bodies, blackened and bloated by the sun, stretched around among broken muskets and dismounted cannon — the steed and rider offering inviting banquets to the foul birds that here batten upon them on every hand, sickens the senses and the soul; strips even victory of its gaudy plumage and stamps the whole with an unspeakable horror.<sup>53</sup>

After the battlefield visit Tobey continued riding to Jalapa.

The road was strewn with corpses of the Mexican stragglers who had been run down by the American dragoons. "Almost every man's skull was literally split open with the sabres of our horsemen and they lay stretched on the ground in ghastly groups," Tobey recorded.<sup>54</sup>

At Jalapa Tobey located the Pennsylvanians' campground, and started reconstructing their participation in the battle. Under the command of General Pillow, they had been put in a position 60 yards from the Mexicans' guns, exposed to their fire, and kept waiting two hours for Pillow's command to advance. The order never came, Tobey reported. Pillow, wounded slightly in the arm, had left the scene, and finally after two hours an order came for the Pennsylvanians to retire. They suffered 30 casualties without firing a shot, Tobey wrote. More were not injured, however, "because they were too near the enemy's guns," which could not be lowered.<sup>55</sup>

Touring through the American camps at Jalapa Tobey found the troops eating well: "All we eat or drink is Mexican, the meat, fresh beef, and the rice, beans, coffee, sugar, etc. were taken at Cerro Gordo."<sup>56</sup> He found groups of the soldiers reading

copies of the new American Star, published by Peoples and Barnard. One of the items in the Star causing discussion among the men was an order forbidding gambling and gambling houses. "Among other appendages to the army you will not be astonished to hear there are many gamblers, who, unable to get along in their 'professional' capacity, come as sutlers' assistants, and in other guises. These fellows pick up a great deal of change" from the soldiers, Tobey noted. He also reported the Mexicans were stepping up their guerrilla warfare behind the American lines. "Between Vera Cruz and Jalapa at least 30 soldiers have been murdered by rancheros, and they will hang on our skirts and continue to kill stragglers," he predicted. "This outrageous mode of warfare" obviously was going to interfere with the mails, Tobey fretted, and "from this time any attempt to send a letter must be hazardous in the extreme."<sup>57</sup>

Two more correspondents, identified only as "Jacques" and "Thomas," arrived at Cerro Gordo in time to send a brief account of the fighting to the St. Louis Reveille. The pair, apparently former printers, had reached Vera Cruz from New Orleans on April 17, and immediately heard news of the impending battle. Jacques wrote, "Thomas and I, without waiting to change our clothes, mounted a pair of swift mules and during the remainder of the day your special correspondents were on the track of the invading army, all four of us, (I speak of Thomas, the mules and myself) in a profuse perspiration." Soon after reaching the battle area Jacques was wounded slightly in the shoulder.

"Fortunately in my left shoulder," he wrote from Vera Curz, "so it doesn't interfere with my writing." He was, however, "trussed...like a rabbit for roasting." Adding a bit of insult to the injury, the Reveille explained, "Again the country has been indebted to the enterprise and foresight of Kendall and his partners...."59

## NOTES

1. Smith, op. cit., II: 37-59.
2. Mexico City American Star, May 30, 1848, quoted in New Orleans Crescent, June 16, 1848.
3. Ibid.
4. New Orleans Delta, April 13, 1847.
5. Washington Union, May 5, 1847.
6. For examples see New Orleans Delta and Picayune, April 13, 1847.
7. New Orleans Picayune, April 15, 1847.
8. Washington Union, May 5, 1847.
9. Ibid.
10. New Orleans Picayune, April 14, 1847.
11. Charleston Courier, April 24, 1847.
12. New Orleans Delta, April 13, 1847.
13. Ibid., July 8, 1847.
14. Ibid.
15. New Orleans Picayune, April 10, 1847.
16. Ibid., April 23, 1847.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid., May 1, 1847.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid., May 6, 1847.



25. Charleston Courier, May 8, 1847. See Picayune, May 2, 1847, for an example of the supplements.
26. New Orleans Delta, May 19, 1847.
27. Ibid., April 23, 1847.
28. Augusta Chronicle and Sentinel, May 7, 1847.
29. New Orleans Delta, May 6, 1847.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. New Orleans Picayune, May 9, 1847.
33. Ibid., May 25, 1847.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid., May 1, 1847.
36. Philadelphia North American, May 10, 1847.
37. New Orleans Picayune, May 1, 1847.
38. Washington Union, May 8, 1847.
39. New Orleans Delta, May 1, 1847.
40. Ibid.
41. Augusta Chronicle and Sentinel, May 24, 1847.
42. Charleston Courier, May 5, 1847.
43. Augusta Chronicle and Sentinel, May 6, 1847.
44. See Washington Union, Baltimore Sun, Philadelphia North American, New York Herald, May 7, 1847, for examples.
45. Washington Union, May 7, 1847.
46. Philadelphia North American, May 4, 1847.
47. Ibid.
48. Ibid.
49. Ibid.

50. Ibid., May 20, 1847.
51. Ibid.
52. Ibid.
53. Ibid.
54. Ibid.
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid., May 28, 1847.
57. Ibid., May 20, 1847.
58. St. Louis Reveille, May 7, 1847.
59. Ibid.

## CHAPTER 14

### THE SUMMER LULL

The war stood still for four months following the battle at Cerro Gordo. Scott, short of supplies, funds and manpower, had to wait at Puebla during Summer, 1847 until he could reinforce his army for the advance on Mexico City. In the meantime, Nicholas P. Trist, the State Department envoy, attempted to establish peace negotiations with the Mexican government. Relations between Trist and Scott were cool at first, but gradually they became friends and by the end of the summer lull they were working in harmony in the attempt to end the war. On the northern front, meanwhile, the war, in effect, had ended. After Buena Vista in February, 1847 there was no further fighting in that area. Taylor, his army reduced in size by Polk in order to bolster Scott's forces, remained in his camp at Monterrey and turned his attention to his developing campaign for the 1848 Whig Party presidential nomination. Although there were occasional scares and rumors that the Mexicans were coming again, they didn't, and the troops in the north had to be content with the dull garrison life of an occupation army during the war's final 16 months.<sup>1</sup>

Another of the war's important correspondents, John E. Durivage, became active during this time. Durivage, a former

Boston and New York newsman who was working as an actor and occasional playwright in New Orleans when the war broke out, was hired by the Picayune to provide coverage from Taylor's army. The paper made the decision to put him on the assignment when it became necessary for Haile, Kendall and Lumsden to follow Scott to Vera Cruz.<sup>2</sup> The paper had anticipated there would be more major fighting on the northern front, but, ironically, Durivage missed Buena Vista and spent almost a year reporting only on camp life and scouting missions.

Durivage left New Orleans on March 20, 1847 at the height of the confusion over Buena Vista. After being delayed by the threat of guerrilla attacks, the correspondent reached the main American camp at Walnut Springs, three miles from Monterrey on April 21. He soon ran into the communication problem which followed Buena Vista — the rear lines remained disrupted by the Mexican guerrillas. It was mid-May before his reports started arriving on a regular basis, the Picayune explaining he was "having trouble sending his letters out."<sup>3</sup> Durivage also was having another problem endemic with Americans new to Mexico — he was sick. After being bed-ridden for a while, he made his way to the Buena Vista battlefield.<sup>4</sup> He wrote, "A long tedious eight days' fever having partially left me I am able to write you again with some little idea of what I am doing."<sup>5</sup> One of the first reports Durivage filed dealt with the growing concern over the volunteers' behavior. The death of an Arkansas volunteer led to his comrades "deliberately murdering twenty-four Mexicans," Durivage

wrote, adding, "This is a fact, a melancholy, incontrovertible fact."<sup>6</sup>

Mail service from Monterrey remained disrupted for most of the summer. On one occasion, when the Picayune received a packet of letters from Durivage a month late, the paper commented: "Of course their contents so far as regards news, had been anticipated by a thousand channels."<sup>7</sup> Writing from Taylor's camp, Durivage described the problem facing the American couriers:

Although there is no regular or considerable force of the enemy on the road, there is a sufficient number of disaffected Mexicans ready to pounce upon small parties or straggler, and it is fool-hardy for smaller parties than six or eight mounted men to go any considerable distance alone or ahead of trains.<sup>8</sup>

When finally settled into the camp, Durivage took time to describe "a torment" he felt. It was not the occasional rattlesnakes, centipedes, tarantulas, the repeated mail failures, the lack of iced drinks or the mosquitoes, he explained. And it was not the loose flag-stone steps found everywhere which when stepped on were "apt to squirt filthy water over your white pants and elegantly polished boots." The torment was, he explained, "myriads of flies." Every house and tent was infested with them, he complained. "The air seems filled with them—they buzz about and settle on your person, they dart into your eyes, insinuate themselves into your nostrles and gambol in your ears....They dispute every mouthful of food a person puts into his mouth, are mixed upon every dish he eats and his drink is converted into a tincture of flies. To read or write during the day is almost a

matter of impossibility."<sup>9</sup>

Durivage was the only major correspondent to spend considerable time at Saltillo, the southernmost anchor of Taylor's defensive line in northern Mexico. In May, 1847, after a hard, hot ride to reach the city, Durivage wrote, "Well, I have penetrated this far into the country of the enemy without seeing anything like fighting or even skirmishing, or seeing an armed Mexican."<sup>10</sup> After covering the last 30 miles of the trip under a hot sun, Durivage was happy to find a street vendor selling fruit ice. "I never tasted a better flavored or more delicious orange ice and the luxury was welcome as unexpected," he explained in a letter to the Picayune. Durivage also was surprised at the appearance of Saltillo. "The streets were all clean and in good repair and in every door and at every window were senoras and señoritas," he commented. "I was delighted to find the place had not suffered in the slightest degree from the occupation of our forces."<sup>11</sup>

However, his happiness was short-lived. Within days of his arrival there Durivage was sick with what he described as "typhus fever." He was bed-ridden for eight days and lost considerable weight. He said the Picayune editors would be "shocked and surprised" if they could see him, because of his weight loss. He decided to return to Monterrey to recover, and gave this description of his ride back:

You would have seen a lank, attenuated individual astride of a diminutive mustang pony, in front of an enormous pair of saddle bags

stuffed almost to bursting; a haversack containing the entire contents of a Saltillo (shop) and a very suspicious looking black bottle hanging from the saddle-bow; an enormous pair of holster pistols and a two-quart canteen... (all belonging) to an individual whose blue Attakapas pants were 'a world too wide for his shrunk shanks.'<sup>12</sup>

At Monterrey Durivage suffered a relapse of his illness, and had to spend another week in bed. The Picayune reported, "His spirits scarcely flag, if we judge by the tone of his latest private note to us."<sup>13</sup>

When he was able to resume writing in the second week of June, Durivage described Monterrey and Saltillo to be filled with "peace rumors." But the correspondent refused to believe them, exposing his bias: "I have so little confidence in anything Mexican."<sup>14</sup> In fact, Durivage was sure that Taylor was preparing to march south to Mexico City. "I have, therefore, a fair prospect of 'revelling in the halls of the Montezumas...and if I live through the campaign and return via Vera Cruz I shall have seen quite as much of the country as I care about," he wrote.<sup>15</sup> Within weeks, however, it was announced most of Taylor's troops were being withdrawn to support Scott's expedition in central Mexico. "Now everything is knocked in the head," Durivage wrote about his hopes of marching to Mexico City. "This leaves Taylor utterly powerless," he explained to the Picayune, but predicted, "This second attempt to paralyze the movements of the old general will but endear him more to the people."<sup>16</sup> Despite removal of more troops, Monterrey was constantly filled with rumors of

advances or retreats. "The town is full of rumors all the time, and as not one single one of them ever turns out to be correct, it greatly tends to destroy one's confidence in humanity and make him look with distrust upon his fellow creatures," Durivage wrote.<sup>17</sup>

Without army activity Durivage reported little news. But it didn't prevent him from writing. One letter in July, 1847 started: "I cannot let the 4th of July pass without writing a short epistle, even though I have no news to communicate...." The "short epistle" which followed contained more than 3,000 words.<sup>18</sup> Finally in late July he had an opportunity to break the monotony of camp life. He reported he was going to make a two-week reconnaissance with a unit of dragoons. "When we'll return or the purpose of the expedition...I haven't the remotest conception....It is sufficient for me to know that I'll have a chance of seeing something and that it promises variety and adventure."<sup>19</sup> It was a welcome break from the camp routine for the reporter, and after several days on the road he wrote: "After a hard ride of twenty-five miles over a rough, rocky road, a good nap and a glorious camp dinner if a person does not feel in the humor for writing I pity him."<sup>20</sup>

Later, Durivage returned to the army's camp at Buena Vista, where he liked the weather and the discipline: "The discipline of General Wool is extremely strict and enforced; and discipline is nine points in the game, especially where volunteers



are concerned."<sup>21</sup> But the correspondent was puzzled at the high rate of illness among the volunteers. During July the average number of deaths in the volunteer regiments had been three a day, he reported, laying the blame to over-eating of fruit. "It really does seem as if they required as much looking after as children," he said of the volunteer troops.<sup>22</sup>

Durivage also was bothered by the army's system of purchasing food for troops at Buena Vista. Most of the corn, flour and cattle used to feed the Americans was obtained from an English company which operated in Parras, a small town on the western flank of Wool's command where the Americans kept a token force. For protection, most of the Mexican merchants in the town would not sell to the "Yankees," Durivage explained. The English firm would "go into the market and buy up everything we want, forestalling us completely, (and) immediately demand higher and unreasonable rates...amounting to exorbitant such as our Government never ought and probably will not pay." Durivage advised that the army should seize the goods if the Mexicans would not sell at reasonable rates.<sup>23</sup>

In the middle of August, Durivage reported on a brief mutiny by the volunteers in the camp. Members of the North Carolina and Virginia regiments had been complaining of the discipline ordered by a colonel in the North Carolina unit. About 30 men gathered in front of the officer's tent, and started throwing stones at it. The colonel arrived on the scene and drew his sword to disperse them, only to have them refuse. He finally

drew two pistols and fired, killing one of the troops. "This prompt and decisive step quelled the mutiny," Durivage reported.<sup>24</sup> In September there was more trouble in the camp when two lieutenants and 19 men of a Texas volunteer company deserted. "They have been so much trouble that General Wool did not think them worth sending after, and suffered them to go their way in peace," Durivage wrote.<sup>25</sup>

Durivage's reports often were defensive about the actions of the Americans, and biased against the Mexicans. In one letter in October, 1847, he noted, "Two American soldiers were arrested last night, charged with having committed a rape upon a Mexican female. I hardly think it is a possible case in this country, but the accused will be tried for the offense nevertheless." The outcome was not reported.<sup>26</sup> Citing the high number of robberies in the area of the camp, Durivage observed, "Since the guerrillos confine their exertions exclusively to robbing Mexicans, I do not know that we have any great reason to complain."<sup>27</sup> On another occasion he wrote, "We had a great circus here last night," and described the interrogation of 40 Mexicans arrested after the murder of an Arkansas volunteer. After watching the questioning Durivage noted, "Mexicans certainly can lie with the best face of any people in the world." He continued,

When we (begin) to civilize the people of this country, the precepts of the venerable and excellent matron, Mother Goose, should be inculcated in every juvenile mind, and the familiar verse which holds up the terrible fate in store for liars painted (sic) up in every domestic throughout...the land.<sup>28</sup>

After making a second scouting mission with the dragoons in September, 1847, Durivage was appointed as a civilian aide on Wool's staff. Although the general gave him the pay and privileges of a major, he did not have the authority to give Durivage the actual military rank. This did not prevent the Picayune from commenting good-humoredly, "The major is hereafter to be 'obeyed and respected' accordingly."<sup>29</sup> Until receiving the appointment the correspondent had been planning to organize a party of civilians to travel to Mexico City, reporting from a number of the towns in northern Mexico which American forces had not captured.<sup>30</sup>

By the middle of October, with the fighting clearly over and Taylor making plans to return to the States, Durivage also decided to end his reporting. He left Buena Vista on October 26, a day "cold enough to freeze the tail off a Norwegian dog."<sup>31</sup> Traveling with Wool, who was replacing Taylor as commander in the north, Durivage arrived at Monterrey two days later. On the following day he rode out to Taylor's camp at Walnut Springs and interviewed the general, reporting him to be "in good health." That night the reporter attended a party at Taylor's camp, assuring the Picayune it was "a delightful affair."<sup>32</sup>

Not so delightful to Durivage were the conditions in the army. His final letters told of numerous military disciplinary actions, hangings and shootings of Mexicans, freezing conditions in the camps because "tents and pantaloons are made of cotton," and depredations in Monterrey by the Massachusetts volunteers.

As a native of Boston, he was particularly rankled by the latter. "I am very sorry to say that the Massachusetts Regiment have left a very bad name behind them, but trust they may be able to retrieve it upon the other line for the credit of the Old Bay State."<sup>33</sup> Durivage left Monterrey on November 8, together with Taylor's party, but soon left it when he grew impatient with its slow pace. He reached New Orleans November 28, ending eight months of reporting the war's events in the north.<sup>34</sup>

George Tobin of the Delta also was active in the northern area, but his reporting was sporadic and often whimsical. Tobin had fought at Buena Vista but his letters had failed to reach the Delta in time to be of value. After the battle he remained with a Texas Rangers unit, and when it was disbanded in June, 1847, Tobin told the Delta he was "in for the war" and had joined another advance scout unit stationed at Parras, Mexico, on the Americans' west flank. It was one of the most advanced of the American positions. When it heard Tobin was staying with the army, the Philadelphia North American said he reminded them of the words from an old song: "How happy the soldier who lives on his pay, and spends all he gets though sixpence a day."<sup>35</sup>

In Summer, 1847, he was promoted to first lieutenant, but his articles continued to carry the title "Captain Tobin."<sup>36</sup> Tobin regularly sent the Delta files of the Mexican papers, but because his letters contained little hard news the paper when busy held them over for several days. On one occasion it noted, "The impatient friends of Capt. Tobin must excuse us for deferring

the publication of his letter one day longer."<sup>37</sup> Tobin returned to New Orleans in mid-July, 1848 and the Delta greeted him as the "Hero of Letter Writers." When he stopped at its office, the paper noted, he was "a burly figure of a fierce looking half-sailor, half-soldier looking individual, in a check shirt, with a Mexican cavalry roundabout, a Texas Ranger's pantaloons and a U.S. infantry cap on."<sup>38</sup>

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Meanwhile, at the headquarters of Scott's army at Puebla, the newspaper competition more and more became a battle between Freaner of the Delta and Kendall of the Picayune. The Delta, in a light moment, referred to the pair as the "Homer of the Delta" and the "Hesiod of the Pic."<sup>39</sup> John Peoples, who had written to the Delta for more than a year, ended the association during the summer and concentrated on his camp newspapers. The Picayune forces also were reduced, Haile having joined the army and Lumsden having returned to New Orleans after breaking his leg at Vera Cruz. Freaner, writing under his popular pseudonym, "Mustang," expanded his efforts during the summer lull, and his name and reporting gained in national recognition. Regarding Freaner's efforts the rival New Orleans Crescent noted, "Mustang—the name is common, but there's magic in it....As an army correspondent (he) has no superior."<sup>40</sup>

Freaner had returned to Vera Cruz on May 7, 1847, and started inland the next day. "Scott cannot advance beyond Puebla without reinforcements," he wrote, "and I'll divide my time

between Puebla, Jalapa and Perote."<sup>41</sup> On his way to join the army Freaner visited one of Santa Anna's abandoned ranches near Vera Cruz. He was shocked to discover "the servant in charge, who is protected (from army interference) by Gen. Scott's orders, is equipping local banditti" for attacks on the Americans. Resuming his trip he assured the Delta, "I will write you from every camp ground en route and send an express if there is another battle."<sup>42</sup>

At Puebla, Freaner set up two courier systems — one taking his dispatches back to Vera Cruz for mailing to New Orleans, and the other traveling through the Mexican lines to Mexico City to obtain the news there. On June 14, he wrote, "I start a courier to the city of Mexico tonight — he will return if he succeeds in passing the guerrillas and robbers in about two days, when I will forward the (newspaper) files to the coast...." Freaner hoped the procedure could operate at least once a week.<sup>43</sup> Freaner also arranged to have the Mexico City papers translated before forwarding them to the Delta. The New Orleans paper was soon running as much as two columns an issue with his efforts.<sup>44</sup>

In addition to receiving the Mexican newspapers, Freaner also sent files of the Delta and the Washington Union to the capital. His cousin was associated with him in the two-way courier system.<sup>45</sup> Among the regular users of Freaner's express system was Trist, the President's peace envoy, Major General Gideon Pillow and General Scott himself. Trist later explained he preferred to use Freaner's express because it was fast and

efficient.<sup>46</sup> When Freaner's packets with the letters of the government officials reached New Orleans, the Delta editors would sort them out, and then place them in the regular U.S. mail service for forwarding to Washington.<sup>47</sup>

A Freaner letter to the Delta on May 21 from Jalapa gave an idea of how he received and shipped his news. "The 'Diligence' is about to leave" for Vera Cruz, he explained, "and I write to give you the latest up to departure. The 'Diligence' from Puebla is looked for momentarily which will give us the correct position of affairs at the capital. If it should arrive in time to overtake the line towards Vera Cruz, I shall send an express to overhaul it." This information was in a letter with the dateline "Jalapa, May 21, 11 1/2 a.m." An accompanying letter, dated "Jalapa, May 21, 12 o'clock," explained, "There was nothing of value on the 'Diligence' from Puebla." However, Freaner included information he obtained from the passengers on the Puebla stage, and a summary of letters he received from other American units, and then sent off the express to catch the Vera Cruz-bound stage.<sup>48</sup>

Because he was moving frequently, and the mails were hampered by the guerrillas, there were some breaks in his reporting during the summer. At the end of July the Delta noted it had not heard from Freaner or Peoples for three weeks: "This to our readers, as well as ourselves is an absolute deprivation."<sup>49</sup> When at last Freaner was able to get some letters through the Delta commented,

His friends particularly, and our readers generally, will no doubt be gratified to hear that their long-lost-friend is found, that he is alive and kicking and has made arrangements by which in the future the long delays which have tortured us for some weeks past will be avoided....<sup>50</sup>

Freaner's writing often showed a high degree of independence from the pro-Democratic Delta, occasionally moving the paper to explain its relationship with the reporter. When Freaner praised the military performance of Scott, the Whig presidential possibility, the Delta ran an editor's note commenting: "We give a letter from (Mustang) referring in very warm terms to (Scott)....We do not feel disposed to impose any limits to the expression of opinions and feelings of our correspondent, even where we may differ from him. We say this in order that our readers may understand our relations."<sup>51</sup> On another occasion the Delta explained: "We need not add we are not prepared to subscribe to Mustang's opinions, but as we aspire to make our paper perfectly impartial, we take pleasure in publishing the opinions and arguments of those who take very different views from ourselves on the (war)."<sup>52</sup> In general, the paper did not interfere with Freaner's performance, and as the war wore on he continued to grow in national stature.

Kendall, meanwhile, was strengthening the Picayune's reporting. He reached Puebla on May 27 and found the city isolated from the outside. The stages from Mexico City were not running, he reported, and there was no indication of what



General Scott planned to do.<sup>53</sup> He already had lost several express packages to the guerrillas on the road to Vera Cruz, he informed the Picayune editors.<sup>54</sup> He closed one letter with a note, "I send this off hap-hazard by the diligence to Jalapa, but it is doubtful whether it will reach New Orleans."<sup>55</sup> In early June, communications were reopened to Mexico City and he was once again able to forward files of the papers from there to the Picayune for abstracting. During June Kendall was ill for several weeks, and he slowed his writing pace "for the simple reason that I had nothing to say."<sup>56</sup> The Picayune commented that its correspondent "perseveres in sending couriers to Vera Cruz, although he has had three captured and one killed."<sup>57</sup>

Most of Kendall's letters at this time were analytical regarding political conditions in Mexico City and the prospects for peace.<sup>58</sup> There was a movement at Mexico City to bring about peace, he said, but added, "To defeat the Mexicans in every encounter is easy enough — to settle all differences and disputes with them will be found an entirely different matter."<sup>59</sup> Kendall didn't believe Trist's peace mission could succeed at this point either. "I believe that the hard blows of 10,000 regulars will have more affect in bringing these people to their senses than all the soft words of an equal number of diplomats," he wrote.<sup>60</sup>

The problem of getting the mail past the guerrillas, then out of the shipping jam in Vera Cruz harbor and through the U.S. Post Office at New Orleans had become a serious problem for both Kendall and Frenner. William Tobey of the Philadelphia North

American, had described the New Orleans postal facility "as the worst run grocery I have ever seen."<sup>61</sup> For their part, the New Orleans papers kept up a steady stream of complaints about it throughout the war, but apparently to little avail.

In an attempt to handle the problems at Vera Cruz, Kendall recruited two former New Orleans printers — William Jewell and D. Scully — to be Picayune correspondents from that city.<sup>62</sup> They reported regularly to the paper on activities there, and handled the Picayune expresses when they arrived from the interior. The Delta also appointed trusted correspondents at Vera Cruz, and for a short period in Fall, 1847, A.H. Hayes, a former co-owner of the paper, assisted with handling its mail and newspapers from the Mexican port.<sup>63</sup> The New Orleans papers also were helped greatly by several U.S. government officials at Vera Cruz, particularly F.M. Dimond, the port collector, Captain B.F. Whittier, the army quartermaster in charge of the main supply dock, and S.D. Allis, the former Picayune office worker who had fought at Monterrey and now served as assistant postmaster. All three were praised repeatedly by the New Orleans papers for their assistance in forwarding their mail and newspapers from Mexico.<sup>64</sup> Allis, with his understanding of the newspapers' desire for speed, worked out a system for placing the mail for the New Orleans newspapers directly in the hands of ship captains, by-passing the post office bottlenecks.<sup>65</sup>

The guerrilla bands were the most difficult problem for the reporters. The army and the press had become more isolated

than they realized. There were enough troops to hold the four principal cities — Vera Cruz, Jalapa, Perote and Puebla — but in between the guerrillas and bandits had free rein. A New Orleans Delta correspondent at Vera Cruz succinctly summed up the situation in that city: "I have not a particle of news for you....The guerrillas are getting bolder and bolder every day, and all communication is cut off....The yellow fever is still raging...."<sup>66</sup> There were only two safe ways to send a message through to the coast: either with an armed American escort of at least 50 to 70 men, or with the English legation's courier, considered as "the only safe and reliable means of information."<sup>67</sup> The latter was allowed to pass through the war zone relatively untroubled because of the Mexican government's dependence on the English for financial and diplomatic support.

Freaner, Kendall and Peoples tried to break the blockade with frequent use of Mexican express riders. Dependent on their own devices, the correspondents operated these private systems from the battle of Cerro Gordo in mid-April, 1847 until March, 1848, when the army finally established reliable mail service between Vera Cruz and Mexico City.<sup>68</sup> The system basically was simple: Freaner and Kendall kept four to six Mexican riders in their employ at all times, and when the news warranted it, the correspondents would write out duplicate copies of their letters and start the riders off for Vera Cruz at intervals of several hours. The toll in riders was heavy, however. At least 25 were

captured and either killed, wounded or tortured by the guerrilla bands.<sup>69</sup>

The Mexican viewpoint on the express riders was quite different. On one occasion the Boletín de Noticias, a pro-Mexican paper published at Jalapa despite its occupation by the American army, stated, "A Mexican acting as a spy for the Americans was arrested in the vicinity of Jalapa" by guerrillas and was to be tried speedily. "Upon the spy were found twenty-five or thirty letters — among them various articles for the papers of the United States," the Jalapa paper reported. Although it reprinted a number of the letters the paper called them "exaggerated" and "absolutely ridiculous."<sup>70</sup> The guerrillas intercepted so much of the mail that there was at least one serious suggestion that they be bribed to let it pass. The Picayune's correspondent at Vera Cruz, D. Scully, proposed the arrangement be made with the guerrillas to allow the paper's news to pass through. "Considerable commerce is now carried on with the interior," he wrote, and noted it was allowed to pass on payment of "a fee" to the guerrillas. "I think if your agents could but hold a parlay with the chief, they might make a contract at a very moderate price to have your letters from (Kendall) brought through regularly. Such an arrangement would (be good) and could, I have not the least doubt, be made."<sup>71</sup>

Another important news source during the lull was the American paper at Puebla. On June 12, Peoples, Barnard and Charles Callahan, a former printer for the New Orleans Picayune,

had started the American Star No. 2. The rapid establishment of the paper led the New Orleans Delta to comment, "It is a locomotive concern and will keep with the advance of the army."<sup>72</sup> The Picayune was happy Callahan had joined Peoples and Barnard, noting:

Mr. Callahan is a new proprietor and a very efficient coadjutor he will prove. He has been for many years connected with this office and we know his intelligence and sterling worth. These wars seduced him from us.<sup>73</sup>

Callahan had joined the first volunteer units raised in New Orleans when Taylor's first urgent call for help came in April, 1846. When the Louisiana Regiment's six-month tour ended, Callahan returned to the Picayune and worked there until March, 1847, when he left for Vera Cruz to see the bombardment. Arriving late, he found work as a printer, and joined Peoples and Barnard when they moved to Puebla to establish the new paper. "It is an interesting and useful paper," the Picayune observed.<sup>74</sup> Taking possession of the printshop of a Mexican newspaper, the trio ran into the same difficulty other American printers were discovering in Mexico — no W's in the alphabet. They resorted to the use of a double V, as did American papers at Monterrey, Saltillo and Chihuahua.<sup>75</sup> Running short of V's, Peoples overcame the problem by filing down Y's to make them into V's. The Puebla Star also helped the isolated Americans overcome another problem faced by most armies — its paperwork. Cut off from the coast, the army units soon ran out of official forms. By utilizing its captured Spanish types and press to the fullest, the Star shop was able to

keep all the army units supplied with proper forms.<sup>76</sup>

After publishing their 17th issue on August 7, 1847, the Star's publishers noted: "As we said in Jalapa, ours is not a 'fixed' Star. We raise it where and whenever the gallant band, whose deeds we chronicle, shall repose...." On the same day the printers packed up their belongings and joined the troops as they started the march toward the Mexican capital.<sup>77</sup>

## NOTES

1. Smith, op. cit., II: 60-78.
2. For information on Durivage's background see St. Louis Reveille, March 27, 1847; New Orleans Picayune, March 30, 1847; New Orleans Delta, September 9, 1846; New York Herald, April 15, 1846.
3. Picayune, May 13, 1847.
4. Ibid., June 1, 1847.
5. Ibid., June 8, 1847.
6. Ibid., May 13, 1847.
7. Ibid., May 25, 1847.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., May 28, 1847.
10. Ibid., June 1, 1847.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid., June 24, 1847.
14. Ibid., June 15, 1847.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid., July 2, 1847.
18. Ibid., July 23, 1847. The length of this item leaves one to suspect Durivage was being paid by the line.
19. Ibid., August 14, 1847.
20. Ibid., September 8, 1847.
21. Ibid., August 6, 1847.
22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.
24. Ibid., September 7, 1847.
25. Ibid., October 9, 1847.
26. Ibid., November 10, 1847.
27. Ibid., October 30, 1847.
28. Ibid., November 2, 1847.
29. Ibid., October 2, 9, 1847.
30. Ibid., October 9, 1847.
31. Ibid., November 27, 1847.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid., November 30, 1847.
35. Philadelphia North American, December 21, 1846.
36. New Orleans Delta, September 29, 1847. Also see Ibid., December 26, 1847, for an example of Tobin's wry sense of humor.
37. Ibid., May 5, 1848.
38. Ibid., July 13, 1848.
39. Ibid., October 15, 1847.
40. New Orleans Crescent, March 5, 1848.
41. New Orleans Delta, May 18, 1847.
42. Ibid., May 25, 1847.
43. Ibid., July 8, 1847.
44. See Ibid., July 11, 1847, for example.
45. Ibid., September 11, 1847.
46. 30th Congress, 1st Session [Senate] Executive No. 65 (August 3, 1848). Message from the President of the United States, Communicating, in Compliance with the Resolution of the



Senate, the Proceedings of the Two Courts of Inquiry in the Case of Major General Pillow, p. 14.

47. Ibid., pp.18-9.
48. New Orleans Delta, May 27, 1847.
49. Ibid., July 30, 1847.
50. Ibid., August 22, 1847.
51. Ibid., May 14, 1848.
52. Ibid., November 17, 1847.
53. New Orleans Picayune, June 8, 1847.
54. Ibid.
55. Ibid., June 22, 1847.
56. Ibid., August 7, 1847.
57. Ibid.
58. For examples see the Picayune, June 22, August 7, 1847.
59. Ibid., May 11, 1847.
60. Ibid., May 28, 1847.
61. Philadelphia North American, May 6, 1847.
62. New Orleans Picayune, June 8, 1847.
63. New Orleans Delta, September 1, November 6, 1847.
64. For examples see Delta, August 8, November 6, 1847, January 14, February 8,13, 1848; New Orleans Crescent, May 4, August 7, 1848; New Orleans Picayune, April 12, 1848.
65. New Orleans Crescent, May 4, 1848.
66. New Orleans Delta, July 23, 1847.
67. Philadelphia North American, September 14, 1847.
68. New Orleans Picayune, March 18, 1848. The Picayune ran a summary article titled "The Perils of Express Riding in Mexico," on August 8, 1847. The paper promised to persevere in getting the news through.

69. For examples of express rider losses see New Orleans Picayune, August 8, September 26, October 5, 1847; February 20, March 18, 1848.

70. Ibid., July 23, 1847.

71. Ibid., October 15, 1847. There is no evidence the suggestion was taken seriously.

72. New Orleans Delta, July 8, 1847.

73. New Orleans Picayune, July 8, 1847.

74. Ibid.

75. Ibid.

76. Mexico City American Star, May 30, 1848, quoted in New Orleans Crescent, June 16, 1848.

77. New Orleans Delta, August 22, 1847.

## CHAPTER 15

### CONTRERAS AND CHURUBUSCO

The long summer lull ended on August 19-20, 1847, with the battles of Contreras and Churubusco near Mexico City. After receiving his reinforcements in early August, Scott had started moving his army of 10,700 men from Puebla to the Mexican capital.<sup>1</sup> Faced with the tactical problem of which approach to make toward the city, Scott decided on a flanking move to the south, around a large lake, Lake Chalco. The move bypassed the Mexicans' strongest fortifications and brought the smaller American army up against less formidable forts and defensive positions on the southwest approach to the city. On August 19 a frontal assault directed by Major General Gideon Pillow on the Mexican positions near the town of Contreras proved unsuccessful, and by the end of the day Scott was fearful he might have lost as much as half of his army. That night, in a heavy rain, a force led by General Persifor F. Smith found a ravine leading to the rear of the Mexican position, and the next morning routed the defenders in a lightning attack.<sup>2</sup>

As the day, August 20, wore on, the Americans followed up the advantage they had won with Smith's attack. The retreating Mexican forces suffered heavy casualties, but Santa Anna, bringing

up reinforcements, attempted to block the American advance toward the city at the fortified town of Churubusco. Scott attacked the position in another frontal attack, and after a costly day-long struggle, finally took the town and sent the remnants of the Mexican army fleeing into the capital. There was no defensive force outside its walls, and most of Scott's officers wanted him to continue the attack at once. Instead, he halted the advance. The Americans had suffered more than 1,000 killed and wounded out of 8,497 engaged in the two-day battle; Scott had reports there were still 20,000 Mexican defenders inside the city; and he didn't want the Mexican government to collapse completely and end all possibility of negotiation. A controversial two-week armistice ensued, and Trist and Scott resumed the work of trying to bring peace by diplomacy.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile, in New Orleans, a severe yellow fever epidemic and a disruption in mail shipments to and from Mexico had slowed the news. In mid-August the Delta reported "the alarming fact yellow fever has broken out."<sup>4</sup> It was described as New Orleans' most severe outbreak in a decade, and the weekly death toll soon climbed past 500.<sup>5</sup> Among these were a number of newsmen and printers.<sup>6</sup> Short handed, and surrounded by the death of many of their advertisers and customers, a number of the daily papers reduced publication to three times a week — including the Courier, Commercial Times, Commercial Bulletin and Bee.<sup>7</sup> The Picayune stated, "The disease and the terrible ravages which it is making are the absorbing topics of conversation in every circle....Grief

and wretchedness are depicted on almost every countenance, and hundreds are clad in the habiments (sic) of woe." The paper also urged non-residents to stay away from the city until "the expiration of the poison in our midst."<sup>8</sup> On September 6, the Picayune reported, "The past week has been the most fatal of the epidemic, which scourges us with a severity which is appalling." (Deaths had averaged 82 a day.) In addition to affecting the newspapers in New Orleans and the other Gulf cities, the epidemic caused a slowdown in the construction of the telegraph line through the Deep South area, effectively eliminating it as a factor in the reporting during the balance of the war. The disease continued to interrupt normal life in New Orleans until the middle of October.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to the normal difficulty of carrying the news through the guerrilla lines, an added problem slowed it at this time. The necessity of transporting reinforcements and supplies for Scott from New Orleans and Texas to Vera Cruz forced the government to divert its troop transports. The McKim, Telegraph, Alabama, New Orleans and other ships which made the regular weekly runs back and forth to the Mexican port were utilized in the more urgent military project, resulting in a 17-day delay in mail deliveries to New Orleans.<sup>10</sup> And at Vera Cruz, the Delta's correspondent reported gloomily that at least five more express riders, three for the Picayune and two for the Delta, "had been cut off" between Vera Cruz and Jalapa. "An express from the army is anxiously looked for, but it is a matter of the merest chance

when it will reach here," the writer concluded.<sup>11</sup>

Freaner and Kendall, meanwhile, were advancing with the army. The Delta's Freaner had departed Puebla on August 8 with General Worth's division.<sup>12</sup> Resting in the army's camp prior to the resumption of fighting Freaner noted, "The division I came up with had a very fine and agreeable march...." He added he had many other army items he'd like to communicate to the Delta, "but I am prevented by the fear my letter might fall into the hands of the enemy."<sup>13</sup> Since the army anticipated it would have another battle before entering Mexico City, Freaner had taken special precautions to try to get his stories through to the Delta. "I have always with me four horses for my own use and eight extras, and four Mexicans, faithful and good riders, who accompany me and are always on hand to ride expresses," he assured the paper. The editors approved of the arrangements, noting, "It is a source of great mortification to us that the expensive arrangements we made to keep up our Mexican correspondence have been sometimes defeated by the success of the guerrillas."<sup>14</sup>

Freaner's hard work and preparations were to pay off for him this time, and his extensive accounts of the battles arrived at the Delta at the same time Kendall's reached the Picayune. Freaner moved with several different units during the fighting, traveled over the battlefields again when the combat ended, and conducted extensive interviews in the camps with principal officers. He also asked several officers to "write out memorandums"

with their impressions for him.<sup>15</sup> One of these memorandums, offered to Freaner by Major General Pillow, later led to an extended controversy in the press and the army regarding its accuracy as to Pillow's contribution to the victories. (Discussed in Chapter 19) "The Mexicans were still burying their friends when I passed over the battlefield two days ago," he wrote on August 26, commenting on the large number cut down by the American guns.<sup>16</sup> So much had happened during the two days, he noted, that the Delta's readers would probably get the best information from the official "reports of the several commands." He continued, "I find that if I were to attempt to record the entire details of the achievements of (August 20) I would not be able to conclude it in time enough to be of any interest to your readers."<sup>17</sup> As it was, Freaner's account, together with an extensive list of killed and wounded he compiled, filled more than six columns in the paper. "It is more full than that furnished by the Picayune," the Augusta Chronicle and Sentinel noted, and before long a number of the country's papers were praising Mustang's efforts.<sup>18</sup>

Kendall had been concerned about the condition of Scott's small army even before it left Puebla. "No man in the United States could believe for one moment the straits to which our army has been driven for want of cash," he wrote to the Picayune.<sup>19</sup> It had become necessary for officers on the quartermasters and commissary units to pay as much as 15% interest to borrow money

to defray the expenses of marching to Mexico City, he reported. When General Twiggs' division led off the departure of Scott's army on August 7 Kendall joined it. "The coming fortnight will come to us burthened with news, and whether it be peace or war to the knife, I shall give you the intelligence as early as possible," he wrote on the eve of departure.<sup>20</sup>

During the August 19-20 battles Kendall served as a volunteer aide to the controversial General Pillow. In his official report after the battle Pillow praised Kendall for "promptly bearing and delivering orders" during the fighting.<sup>21</sup> Kendall's assistance to Pillow turned out to have ironical overtones, because in the months that followed the reporter was attacked extensively in Democratic newspapers for understating Pillow's reputed role in the victories.<sup>22</sup>

When the fighting ended Kendall quickly started to put together the details of the two days. His first account was an overall sketch of the fighting. He followed this up a day later with a more inclusive story. "To describe the fierce conflict even now that two days have elapsed, or to give an account of the part taken by the different regiments, (is) impossible," he stated. Like Freaner, Kendall assembled an extensive list of the killed and wounded. His many letters and the casualty list filled more than nine columns of the Picayune.<sup>23</sup> Despite the volume of Kendall's letters, the Picayune did not attempt to cut them. "We make no attempt at a summary," it said. "We are persuaded that every word of them will be read with interest."<sup>24</sup>



The truce agreement at the end of the fighting greatly bothered Kendall. Because of his previous imprisonment at Mexico City, and his long involvement in reporting Mexican affairs, he deeply mistrusted Santa Anna and the British. He was in Scott's camp on the night of August 20 when a coach arrived from Mexico City carrying Edward Thornton, secretary to the British Embassy, and Ewen Mackintosh, the British consul-general. U.S. Navy Lieutenant Raphael Semmes, who was standing with Kendall at the time, later recorded that the correspondent was highly upset at the sight of Mackintosh. "When they had gone, Kendall, with the bluntness and frankness which characterize him, exclaimed: 'It's no use, we're humbugged — McIntosh (sic) is among them!'"<sup>25</sup> After a short time Mackintosh appeared again, this time to talk to General Worth about sparing the lives of a group of Irish immigrants who had deserted the American Army to join the Mexican forces. Kendall recorded the scene: "With eyes flashing the impetuous American general told the Englishman that the rules and articles of war in the British army, in relation to deserters, were the same as those of the United States, were short, and he would repeat them: 'He who deserts to the enemy in the time of war, shall suffer death.'"<sup>26</sup> With that the English representatives left.

In letters to the Picayune Kendall expanded on his opinions about the truce: "The armistice has finally been settled and signed and I do not tell half the story when I say that it has produced universal dissatisfaction in the army — in

the entire army."<sup>27</sup> He continued, "The whole affair, on the face of it, looks like one of Santa Anna's old tricks to gain time and plan some new scheme of trickery...and as he had British influence to back him he will be likely to carry out what he undertakes." The Mexican defenses were so weak at the end of the battles on August 20, Kendall said, "that one of our weakest regiments could have entered the Grand Plaza with but little opposition...and driven every soldier out of the city...."<sup>28</sup> By August 28 Kendall was reporting Mexican violations of the armistice, observing with his obvious bias, "Give a Mexican an inch and he'll take seven miles and a half."<sup>29</sup>

Kendall's reports of the battles at Contreras and Churubusco started a political backlash against him in some of the country's Democratic newspapers. The Boston Post and the Washington Union, strong backers of the Polk Administration, led the attack. The Post printed a letter which charged Kendall "had suppressed the truth" regarding Pillow's contribution to the victory. The letter also charged Kendall had not done justice to either Generals Franklin Pierce or James Shields because they too were Democrats. It cautioned Democrats around the country "not to confide in the representations of Mr. Kendall when democratic officers are interested."<sup>30</sup> The Union reprinted the Post's charges without comment.

"A viler slander was never penned," the Picayune rebutted. The Picayune noted it was "being censured for attempting to injure General Pillow by (our) silence in regard to him."<sup>31</sup> The New

Orleans paper went on to point out it had reprinted every account of the two battles it had been able to obtain, including the official military reports from the Union, "partially because of the interest and importance of the battles themselves, and partially from a desire to justify the original report we gave from the pen of Mr. Kendall." The Picayune noted it had also "incurred" the additional expense of engraving and printing maps of the battles "to render the different narratives clear." It added, "The report of Mr. Kendall has been confirmed by every report we have seen yet from military authority."<sup>32</sup>

In the public confusion over the purpose of the temporary truce, the Union also attempted to discredit Kendall, who it insisted was only representing the Whigs in Mexico, by accusing him of attacking Scott, the Whig presidential hopeful. The administration paper took a line from one of Kendall's letters which said the armistice "has produced universal dissatisfaction in the army" and said it represented "a slur against Scott." Further, the Union argued, a line in Kendall's letter the next day, which read the truce "may lead to some kind of peace," was an attempt to soften down the censure. The Union concluded sanctimoniously, "We are unwilling, until we receive fuller and official accounts, to discuss the question, or to cast any slur upon the general, whose military services are receiving the thanks of the people."<sup>33</sup>

In rebuttal the Picayune stated:

We did not understand...Mr. Kendall as censuring General Scott himself on account of the armistice, nor do we think the language used by

him will justify... (criticism) by the Union.  
 Our colleague aims faithfully to narrate the  
 occurrences in the army and the opinions (of)...  
 officers and men connected with it. He has no  
 prejudices against the commanding general to  
 gratify....<sup>34</sup>

The dispute simmered for a period, but when the fighting resumed, and more of Kendall's reports came, the issue came into the open again. (See Chapter 16).

Freaner and Kendall had their express riders under way soon after the two-day battle ended. The first word of the two victories reached the United States by a much more unusual route, however. On the morning after the defeat, the official Mexican government newspaper at Mexico City, Dario Oficial del Gobierno, carried a summary of the fighting and the armistice. A copy of the paper was taken by a Mexican express rider to the city of Orizaba, halfway between the capital and Vera Cruz. Although it was not occupied by the Americans, an American representative stationed in the city forwarded a summary of the paper's contents to F.M. Dimond, the U.S. collector at Vera Cruz. Dimond received the report on August 26, and made it available to the reporters in the port city. They in turn dispatched it to New Orleans, and on the morning of September 3 a Picayune extra proclaimed:

American Arms Again Victorious!

The Mexicans Defeated by Gen. Scott in  
 Two Distinct Engagements

The City of Mexico at our Mercy

Before long the express riders were under way to the North. On September 4 the telegraph line from the North reached Petersburg, Virginia, 20 miles farther south than previously. On that day an item in the Washington Union asked the editor of the Petersburg Republican to make arrangements for a competent reporter to "transmit at once" any important news from Mexico via New Orleans "and we will cheerfully meet any expenses which it may incur."<sup>35</sup> The Union had a chance to pay off five days later, September 9, but the telegram came from Fredericksburg, not Petersburg, Virginia.

"The mails and the telegraph to the South" had failed, a reporter in Fredericksburg wired the Union, but John R. Martin, the mail agent there, had received a brief summary of the Picayune's September 3 report from Vera Cruz. Martin had telegraphed the news to Postmaster Cave Johnson (who presumably notified the President) and at the same time made it available to the press. The Philadelphia and Baltimore papers had it the same day, September 9, and the next morning it reached New York.<sup>36</sup>

The battle reports from Kendall and Frenner reached New Orleans about 2 a.m. September 8. Both papers rushed to get extras on the street. The issues of September 8 basically were condensations of the correspondents' many long letters, while the full documents ran the following day.<sup>37</sup> The same morning the news arrived at New Orleans, Trist's messages to the State Department with the reports of the victories also arrived, and were

dispatched by special messenger for Washington. The same courier took along a copy of the Picayune, with its three columns of news about the battles, and it was delivered to the Baltimore Sun on the evening of September 14 -- covering the distance in six days and a few hours. The Sun had the Picayune's report reset and on the streets before the regular mail arrived from the south.<sup>38</sup>

## NOTES

1. Smith, op. cit., II: 92-93.
2. Ibid., Chaps. 25-26.
3. Ibid., Chap. 27.
4. New Orleans Delta, August 12, 1847.
5. New Orleans Picayune, September 15, 1847.
6. Ibid., September 15, 25, 1847.
7. New Orleans Delta, September 7, 1847.
8. New Orleans Picayune, September 2, 1847.
9. Ibid., October 3, 15, 1847.
10. Ibid., September 22, 1847.
11. Quoted in Washington Union, August 28, 1847.
12. Augusta Chronicle and Sentinel, August 30, 1847.
13. New Orleans Delta, September 10, 1847.
14. Ibid., September 11, 1847.
15. Ibid., September 10, 1847.
16. Ibid., September 9, 1847.
17. Ibid.
18. Augusta Chronicle and Sentinel, September 14, 1847; also see Washington Union, September 17, 1847, and Philadelphia Public Ledger quoted in New Orleans Delta, September 29, 1847.
19. New Orleans Picayune, August 20, 1847.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid., November 28, 1847.
22. See Chapter 16 for this discussion.
23. New Orleans Picayune, September 9, 1847.

24. Ibid.

25. Quoted in Edward S. Wallace, General William Jenkins Worth, Monterey's Forgotten Hero (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1953), p. 157.

26. Ibid., p. 158. About 35 of the deserters were later executed, but Scott spared about the same number.

27. New Orleans Picayune, September 9, 1847.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid.

30. Quoted in Ibid., October 21, 1847.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

33. Washington Union, quoted in New Orleans Picayune, September 25, 1847. The statement is made more sanctimonious by the fact the Union itself attacked Scott over the armistice. See Picayune, September 24, 1847.

34. New Orleans Picayune, September 25, 1847.

35. Washington Union, September 4, 1847.

36. Philadelphia North American, September 9, 1847; New York Herald, September 10, 1847.

37. New Orleans Delta and Picayune, September 8,9, 1847.

38. Recounted in the Picayune, September 23, 1847.



## CHAPTER 16

### THE FALL OF MEXICO CITY

The pressure to be first with the news led to a number of mistaken reports about the fall of Mexico City during the Summer of 1847. On July 30 two weeks before Scott even started for the Mexican capital, the New Orleans National issued an extra edition stating he had taken the city without a fight.<sup>1</sup> The next morning the Delta stated, "We have reason to believe this is substantially true."<sup>2</sup> The Picayune, however, disagreed strongly with the report. The National's editor, Thomas Bangs Thorpe, was sincere in using the news, it said, "but we are unable to arrive at the same conclusion." The Picayune added that it had the same report two days earlier "but did not believe it and did not use it."<sup>3</sup> Newspapers in a number of other cities, however, did believe the National's report. In Philadelphia it was reported "flags were flying...from the Ledger, Inquirer, Sun, North American, Pennsylvania and other newspaper offices" after the news arrived.<sup>4</sup> The St. Louis papers also used the story, but "with doubts," the St. Louis Republican reported.<sup>5</sup> It was another week before a letter from the Picayune's Kendall came through the guerrilla's blockade, confirming Scott was still at Puebla.<sup>6</sup>

The New York Sun also ran an alleged report of a battle to capture Mexico City, which was criticized by many papers. The false report was issued in New York on September 13, the very day the real battle was being fought at Mexico City. "The (story) is not worth publishing even as a joke," the Washington Union scolded.<sup>7</sup> "It is said to have been received by their swift courier Baron Munchausen," said the New Orleans Picayune, referring to a popular 18th Century book, The Adventures of Baron Munchausen, a series of bizarre tall tales.<sup>8</sup> The National Intelligencer and New York Journal of Commerce were more direct in their reactions, stating flatly the letter had been written in New York.<sup>9</sup> The New Orleans Delta criticized the Sun's effort, but printed it. "It's a fancy sketch even if fictitious," the paper said, justifying its action.<sup>10</sup>

During the confusion of the conflicting reports the Charleston Courier explained, "We proceed to give all the intelligence received by Express, leaving our readers to draw their own conclusions."<sup>11</sup> "The rumors from the seat of war are certainly alarming," the New York Herald agreed, "and if they are founded on truth, our gallant little army is indeed in a precarious situation."<sup>12</sup> The Philadelphia North American told its readers:

The position of the army in Mexico is one calculated to produce the deepest anxiety in the breast of every American — anxiety all the more harrassing from the mystery which surrounds it, and the wild, vague, exciting rumors of battle and carnage, amazing victories and terrible perils, which come to us through Mexican channels.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, in an atmosphere mixed with rumor and mystery, the press and public waited, and looked anxiously for news from the South.

\* \* \* \* \*

In truth, the situation had grown more precarious for Scott's army. The renewed peace negotiations looked hopeful at first, but as the shock of the August 19-20 defeats diminished the Mexican position hardened. Trist stood firm on the American demands for California, New Mexico and the Rio Grande boundary. Santa Anna, his power weakened by internal politics and the disgrace of the defeats, decided to fight the smaller American army again. He hoped it might be reduced in size even more, and perhaps, put in such a perilous position, the Americans would reduce their terms in order to save it. Scott now had 8,000 effectives to Santa Anna's estimated 20,000.<sup>14</sup>

The Mexicans broke off the talks on September 6, after having violated the armistice provisions by reinforcing their key defensive fort, Chapultepec. A half mile to the west of Chapultepec, which guarded the western approach to the city, was an intricate arrangement of low stone buildings called El Molino del Rey (The King's Mill). Scott believed cannons to defend the capital were being forged there, and that a quick American raid would destroy the works. He ordered General Worth to attack it the night of September 7, but Worth requested a daylight attack. The assault plan was then enlarged, and on September 8 the fighting resumed. It was a costly mistake. The Americans suffered 700 casualties and found no cannon forge or military value

in the position after it finally was taken.<sup>15</sup>

As Santa Anna had hoped, the American position was furthered weakened. Scott's army was reduced and out of position to attack the capital, it had to guard its wounded and supplies, and it had incomplete intelligence as to the size and placement of the Mexican defenders. After conferences with his generals and engineers, Scott decided to attack from the west, directly at Chapultepec, which had a reputation of impregnability.<sup>16</sup>

On September 11 the Americans made a feint to the south, and the next morning began the assault on Chapultepec with a day-long artillery barrage. On September 13 Scott's forces assaulted the hill-top fort from several directions, and after being repulsed in their first efforts, finally took it by mid-day. The rest of the day was spent in eliminating the remaining defenses outside the city, and by nightfall Scott's forces were at the northwest and southwest gates of the capital. During the night, Santa Anna, his army demoralized, cash and supplies low, and without adequate defensive positions, evacuated the city. The next morning, September 4, Scott's troops marched in, ending the major military operations of the war.<sup>17</sup>

The press coverage of the final assault came in two parts: first, the battle for Molina del Rey on September 8, and then the final three-day action to take Chapultepec, the western gates and the city itself. On the morning of September 8 Kendall accompanied General Worth, who was directing the main assault on the mill. "For some time the result was doubtful," Kendall wrote

to the Picayune, that night, because of the strength of the Mexican position and the fact the Americans had to charge across an open plain to get at it. He reported, "Our small force's... dauntless courage carried them over every obstacle, and notwithstanding the Mexicans fought with a valor rare for them, they were finally routed from one point or another until all were driven or dispersed. The defeat was total."<sup>18</sup>

He was quick to add, "To gain this victory our own loss has been uncommonly severe — it has been purchased with the blood of some of the most gallant spirits of the army." Kendall started to work as soon as the fighting ended to try to assemble a casualty list. "Knowing the deep anxiety felt in the United States by the families of all, this shall be my first care," he stated. It was a difficult task, made more difficult when the Mexicans shelled some ambulances picking up the American dead from the field. General Scott and Trist were riding across the battlefield when this occurred, Kendall reported, and an officer standing next to the correspondent "with a sarcastic expression of countenance asked whether Mr. Trist had any new peace propositions in his pockets." Kendall was happy to note that Mackintosh and the other British diplomats "did not come out after the battle to gain more time for Santa Anna, nor worm out fresh intelligence on the strength and movements of our army..."<sup>19</sup>

The Delta's Frenner also had a good view of the assault at El Molino. When the day's fighting was over he was appalled at its outcome: "We were deceived in reference to the character

of the buildings, as there was no foundary or even a resemblance of one — and after blowing up some of the buildings, and bringing off our killed and wounded, we evacuated the place, as the occupation of it would give us no advantage. Our loss was 800 killed, wounded and missing."<sup>20</sup> Like Kendall, Frenner started to put together a casualty list, noting, "Many a tear will be shed on its perusal, and many a heart will bleed for the noble souls, and the old and firm veterans who fell in the assault."<sup>21</sup> Frenner's meticulous list of killed and wounded, which also indicated the extensive number of casualties the Americans sustained, filled four columns in agate type in the Delta.<sup>22</sup>

On the morning of September 12 Kendall watched as the Americans started the day-long bombardment of Chapultepec. That night he wrote, "(Our movements) indicate that the strong works up on the crest are to be stormed early tomorrow...I have little time to write."<sup>23</sup> Two nights later, having witnessed the fall of Chapultepec and the capture of the city, the Picayune correspondent opened his letter:

Another victory, glorious in its results which have thrown additional lustre upon the American arms, have been achieved today by the army under General Scott — the proud capital of Mexico has fallen into the power of a mere handful of men compared with the immense odds arrayed against them, and Santa Anna, instead of shedding his blood as he had promised, is wandering with the remnant of his army no one knows whither.<sup>24</sup>

Regarding the obstacle at Chapultepec, Kendall reported, "The apparently impregnable works on Chapultepec, after a

desperate struggle, were triumphantly carried....the daring and impetuosity of our men overcame one defense after another.... although at great loss...."<sup>25</sup> Although the battle for Chapultepec is now considered one of the war's more famous events, it was not reported extensively by the reporters of the time. Frenner and Kendall were the only regular correspondents to witness it.

(John Peoples apparently did, too, but he was not writing to an American newspaper at the time.) For more than a century it has been viewed in Mexican history as one of the highpoints of the Mexicans' resistance to the American invasion. It was the site of Mexico's military academy, and at the height of its defense a number of boy cadets reportedly were killed, or committed suicide rather than surrender. Some Mexican revisionist historians have questioned whether the defense was as valiant as once believed.<sup>26</sup> At any rate, it apparently did not impress Kendall and Frenner, as they make only passing reference to it.<sup>27</sup>

At 7 a.m. on September 14 Kendall watched as Scott "with his staff rode in and took quarters at the National Palace, on the top of which the regimental flag of the Stars and Stripes were already flying."<sup>28</sup> Santa Anna's last act before evaluating the city had been to open all prison doors. The result was sporadic, day-long street fighting against the Americans, forcing Scott to have dragoons sweep through the city's streets. "Many innocent people have doubtless been killed during the day," Kendall reported, "but this could not be avoided." Several more days of "assassinations" followed before American control was completed.

"The fault lies partially with our own men, who straggle from their quarters and get intoxicated at the first...grog shop," Kendall said. The fact these men were being murdered "shows that a feeling of revenge and deep hatred (remains) against us...", he concluded.<sup>29</sup>

With all of his reports of the fighting from September 8-14 completed, the Picayune editor supplemented his packet of letters by including Mexican newspapers, captured documents and a daily diary he had kept since August 30. "In the main I believe I was correct in my surmises, although not always right," he closed.<sup>30</sup>

Freaner, meanwhile, also had been busy during the final assault on the Mexican capital. On September 12, the day of the Chapultepec bombardment, he watched as the American engineers scouted the Mexican defenses in order to provide intelligence for Scott. The correspondent gushed, "The Engineers, throughout all our operations, have performed a most dangerous and laborious duty. They have proved themselves to be men of sterling worth -- of masterly ability, and bright ornaments of their profession."<sup>31</sup> On September 13, the day Chapultepec fell and the Americans reached the city gates, Freaner accompanied Lieutenant P.G.T. Beauregard (later of Civil War fame). It was a hectic day for both, particularly since Beauregard was in the engineers, who frequently had to scout the Mexican defenses before the main American forces attacked. At one point Freaner reported, "I saw (Beauregard) complete his reconnaissance of the (main city gate)



after he had received two severe contusions."<sup>32</sup>

From their descriptions it is clear Kendall and Frenner were under frequent fire and both suffered minor injuries in the final assault. Kendall didn't mention the incidents in his reports, but Frenner filled in the details. Kendall's injury was not considered serious, Frenner wrote, "as the ball struck him right plumb in his horse's ear and at the present he looks to be in as fine health and spirits as I have even seen him and as well as a 'war-torn soldier' might expect to be...."<sup>33</sup> After the Delta's account of Kendall's injury appeared, the Picayune explained, "He was slightly wounded...by a musket ball in the knee, but the injury was so slight that we would not have mentioned it if (the Delta) had not."<sup>34</sup> General Worth's official report to the War Department noted Kendall was wounded while carrying orders during the fighting, and said he "exhibited habitual gallantry, intelligence and devotion."<sup>35</sup>

Frenner said a spent ball struck his horse's saddle but caused little damage. "Mustang" also was knocked "head over heels" by an exploding shell. "Being in a hurry to pick myself up I trod on an officer, who said I had no business being there anyhow," Frenner related. The battle over, Frenner settled down in camp and reported: "Now, having taken a bath, brushed off the smoke and dust of battle, and between good liquor, good segars and a moderate share of the balance of the good things of the world 'am as comfortable as might be expected under the circumstances.'"<sup>36</sup>

With the fighting ended the correspondents faced the problem that occurred frequently after the war's major battles. The small American forces were usually so exhausted and stretched thin they could not immediately organize courier escorts to the rear. Sending single riders, or small groups, still was dangerous. As a result, Kendall and Freaner prepared duplicate copies of their letters and other materials. Their fears were justified, and Freaner lost at least two dispatches which contained his first detailed letters regarding the fighting at El Molina del Rey. Freaner's article regarding the Molina attack finally reached the Delta seven weeks later through a chain of circumstances. His messenger carrying it to Vera Cruz was captured by guerrillas and the letters taken. The article turned up in a Mexican paper, Nacional, at Atlixco. It was then reprinted in the Arco Iris at Vera Cruz. The Delta commented, "Our Mexican friends are welcome to it; they have read a better account of the battles than any furnished by their own (people)." Freaner, the paper noted, had sent it a duplicate summary of the battle.<sup>37</sup>

After the long wait and anxiety regarding the outcome at Mexico City, the New Orleans papers were not sure they had the correct information when it finally came. The first Mexican rider with news of Scott's victories reached Vera Cruz on September 18. This report appeared in the Spanish-language Vera Cruz Sol de Anahuac on September 20, but it had some of the facts garbled.<sup>38</sup> Meanwhile, F.M. Dimond, the American collector at Vera Cruz, received a message regarding the victories via an

express rider from the city of Orizaba. Following the same pattern as the message Dimond had received about the victories at Contreras and Churubusco, the three-paragraph report said simply that Scott had taken Chapultepec and Mexico City. Vouching "for its authenticity," the Picayune's Vera Cruz correspondent D. Scully packed the short message into a bundle of Kendall's earlier letters which he was forwarding to the paper.<sup>39</sup> At the same time, the Delta's Vera Cruz correspondent, identified only as "Alpha," was sending his paper the Mexican report of the victory and Dimond's letter.<sup>40</sup> Both shipments went aboard the steamer James L. Day, which reached New Orleans on September 25. The newspapers had extras out that day, and followed with more complete accounts the following day. Each paper used caution in presenting the reports of victory, the Picayune explaining, "They are brief, but sufficient to satisfy the public curiosity and allay the anxiety for the fate of the army...."<sup>41</sup>

A number of factors confused the issue for the New Orleans press. The city was still recovering from the yellow fever epidemic; and ship arrivals from Vera Cruz had been infrequent for more than a month because of military shipments and a tropical storm on the Gulf of Mexico.<sup>42</sup> "The great news from Mexico City came...just when it was least looked for," the Charleston Courier's New Orleans correspondent explained. The accounts "were meager and deficient of details but authentic," the writer continued. "In fact, the only reliable basis for it is the Orizaba letter (to Dimond) which consists of a half dozen

pithy lines...."<sup>43</sup>

Also handicapping the New Orleans papers were the numerous incorrect, misleading and partial reports they had been receiving for more than a month. Additionally there was the traditional pattern of handling news, which led the papers into the habit of running every item they received, using little explanation, interpretation or followup. Further, there was the customary method of presenting news chronologically — regardless of an item's importance. Finally, in the same shipment, the Picayune and Delta received long followup reports from Kendall and Freaner regarding the earlier battles, and these reports, as usual, received preferred treatment over other items from Mexico. As a result, the Dimond letter and the Mexican newspaper reports were buried in an entire page of Mexico news in both papers.<sup>44</sup>

The Picayune extra was soon in the hands of the express riders, and the news reached Charleston on October 1. "It is still very disjointed news," the Courier commented, but it called attention to the importance of Dimond's letter.<sup>45</sup> This time the telegraph worked from Petersburg to the North, and the Washington Union and other northern papers ran a telegraphic summary from the September 26 Picayune in their editions of October 3.<sup>46</sup>

"This bulletin flew about with the velocity of lightning throughout the city," the Union commented.<sup>47</sup> For the people and papers on the northern seaboard it now became a case "of watching nightly for the Sun's ponies."<sup>48</sup>

On October 5 the Picayune carried another letter from

Scully at Vera Cruz, dated September 22, which stated, "The information which I sent you (previously) that Gen. Scott has entered Mexico has been fully confirmed today but with few additional particulars." Scully closed the letter by informing the paper that "Mr. Kendall has sent down four other couriers since he left Puebla, none of whom have reached here."<sup>49</sup> On the same day, October 5, the New York Sun published yet another of its false reports which claimed the Americans took possession of the city on September 16, but it had a number of plausible facts, and, as on other occasions, was widely reprinted.<sup>50</sup> When this version reached New Orleans it raised the ire of the Picayune: "There has been too much of this manufacturing news from Mexico for the Sun's columns (and unfortunately it's) copied into the most respectable journals and entire credence given to it. In our opinion it is a fabrication."<sup>51</sup>

By the second week of October confirmation of the victories still had not reached the States. "There never was a time when the longing for definite and reliable accounts was more intense," the Charleston Courier reported.<sup>52</sup> Shipping on the Gulf of Mexico, meanwhile was again disrupted by a heavy storm. At Vera Cruz ships were unable to leave port between October 3 and 7. On the 7th the steamer Fashion finally was able to clear port, carrying with it the detailed battle reports from Freaner and Kendall. The mail reached the Picayune and Delta in time for extra editions on October 13, and they printed fuller accounts on October 14 and 15.<sup>53</sup>

Once again it was up to the express riders. They reached Charleston October 18 and Petersburg on October 20. A telegraphic report from there dated "October 20, 8 a.m." informed the press of the North that confirmation had arrived.<sup>54</sup> It was put on the wire by the Baltimore Sun's express rider, who stopped long enough to inform the paper of the main details. The express, with full accounts from Kendall and Frenner reached Baltimore that night and by the next day they had been distributed throughout the Northeast.<sup>55</sup>

With the arrival of the letters of Kendall and Frenner a new round of quarrels broke out in the press over who had done the best job of reporting. For the most part it was limited to a handful of Democratic papers, principally the Washington Union and the Delta, with the Picayune defending Kendall. The Union opened the attack on October 21, the same night Kendall's letters first arrived. The paper noted it was running Kendall's reports ahead of Frenner's because they arrived first. "We take this occasion, however, to enter a caveat against those portions of Kendall's letters which do gross injustice to the Administration. We are sorry to see his party feelings prompting him to misrepresent its course," a Union editorial stated. What rankled the paper most was a statement in one of Kendall's letters that the Administration had offered Santa Anna a "bribe" in order to open negotiations. "He is grossly illiberal in attributing 'bribery' to the Administration," the Union said of Kendall.<sup>56</sup>

Two days later the Union renewed the attack. It said

Kendall was "one of the most industrious" of the army correspondents, "but a whig" and "not as impartial as he might have been." In particular, the paper charged, he had ignored the contributions of General Pillow and his "description of the battle of Chapultepec (was) singularly meagre." On the other hand, the paper said, "Mustang's letters...supply many of the omissions and do justice to all the gallant officers...." In closing the Union had one more knock for Kendall: "We leave the public to judge of the propriety of these partisan statements. We regret to see it in a gentleman who is a man of letters, and a man of talent, and from whom we expected all the impartiality of a faithful historian of the events he describes."<sup>57</sup> A New York Herald Washington correspondent charged that Polk had written a note to Union editor Thomas Ritchie directing him not to republish Kendall's letters. Ritchie denied the allegation, stating, "We received no such note, nor such a request in any other form from the President."<sup>58</sup>

The Picayune was still defending Kendall against the earlier charges by the Boston Post and the Union when the administration paper renewed the quarrel. On October 21 the New Orleans paper stated it had run Kendall's letters exactly as he had sent them, had republished "almost every line" the Union had printed about the August 19-20 battles and had incurred extra expense to have engravings made of the battlefield maps so its readers could better understand the events. The paper also pointed out it had republished many letters about the battles

from other papers "from a desire to justify the original report we gave from the pen of Mr. Kendall." "Yet we are charged with the suppression of the truth," the Picayune editorial stated, with a tone of bemusement.<sup>59</sup>

The Picayune presented a number of rebuttals to the Union's charges, arguing repeatedly the official military record sustained Kendall, and history would too.<sup>60</sup> Yet another attack on Kendall, which appeared in the Union on December 4, referred to the correspondent as "a camp follower." However, it acknowledged the popularity of his reports about the war. "Direct from the scene of action, his letters have attained a degree of popularity, and many have considered him an oracle in all matters of fact and opinion about which he has chosen to write."<sup>61</sup> The truth, the letter argued, was that Kendall was "a camp follower" who "has continued for eighteen months to offend against good taste and good manners by his gossiping letters from the army." It also charged that he singled out favorites and that his letters only represented "factions and parties" within the army. "'Kendall's letters' have long been looked upon by the army as fictions — sometimes amusing enough, but not to be fully relied upon as records of 'the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.'"<sup>62</sup>

The Delta's attacks on Kendall centered on the charge he was not giving sufficient credit to General Pillow.<sup>63</sup> The Delta's defense of Pillow was so strong in the eyes of some papers that they referred to the New Orleans publication as "the organ of a



certain general." The Delta rebutted "this is a stale calumny" and that other papers "could not say anything more offensive to our feelings...."<sup>64</sup>

Another Picayune defense of Kendall in mid-December stated: "We leave Mr. Kendall's letters to the judgment of the country, enlightened as it is by official despatches (sic) and concurrent testimony of the great actors in the bloody drama now drawing to a close." The paper pointed out it had repeatedly printed Pillow's "side in the controversies," and all his official reports "without omission." It was time to dismiss the dispute, the Picayune said, because "as journalists we take more pleasure in discussing public transactions in which, as Americans, we take pride."<sup>65</sup>

In late December Kendall departed New Orleans on a trip to Europe, travelling through Washington, Philadelphia, New York and Boston en route. The Washington correspondent of the Mobile (Ala.) Register reported Kendall's stop at the capital included some electioneering for Zachary Taylor and an attempt "to mend the Whig breach" between the Taylor and Henry Clay factions.<sup>66</sup> The Picayune's regular New York correspondent wrote Kendall "was revelling in the halls of the Astor," and was being greeted by crowds "of notables" everywhere. "Kendall was 'some punkins' I assure you," the correspondent stated, after meeting him at a large banquet.<sup>67</sup> On another occasion the same Picayune reporter met Kendall in company with U.S. Senator Sam Houston of Texas, Colonel McCullough of the Texas Rangers and several staff members

from the magazine Spirit of the Times, celebrating at a New York restaurant.<sup>68</sup> Kendall arrived in London in April, 1848, and crossed the channel to Paris a month later, arriving in time to witness the start of the French Revolution of 1848. With the Mexican War not even concluded, the energetic Picayune editor was soon filing a new batch of foreign correspondence on Europe's newest war.<sup>69</sup>

In spite of the contemporary attacks by some of the Polk Administration supporters, Kendall's Mexico reporting has been supported by the judgment of history. Together with Freamer, the Picayune correspondent worked under difficult battlefield conditions to report the varied and hectic events of September 8-14 as the Americans mounted the final attacks on the Mexican capital. Both suffered injuries, but followed through with detailed accounts of the fighting and surrender of the city. They dispatched their couriers for New Orleans as soon as safely possible after the fighting ended, and, as on previous occasions, it was their reporting which informed the American government and public of what had transpired at the distant scene of action.

## NOTES

1. New Orleans Delta, July 31, 1847.
2. Ibid.
3. New Orleans Picayune, August 1, 1847.
4. Philadelphia Pennsylvanian of August 11, 1847, quoted in New Orleans Delta, August 20, 1847.
5. Quoted in New Orleans Picayune, August 22, 1847. For other false reports see New Orleans Delta, September 3, 9, 1847.
6. New Orleans Picayune, August 7, 1847. Kendall's letter was written from Puebla July 30, the same day as the National's false report.
7. Washington Union, September, 1847.
8. New Orleans Picayune, October 15, 1847.
9. Quoted in Ibid.
10. New Orleans Delta, October 14, 1847.
11. Charleston Courier, September 29, 1847.
12. New York Herald, October 14, 1847.
13. Philadelphia North American, October 5, 1847.
14. Smith, op. cit., Chap. 27.
15. Ibid., II: 140-48.
16. Ibid., II: 149-152.
17. Ibid., II: 153-164.
18. New Orleans Picayune, October 14, 1847.
19. Ibid.
20. Quoted in Augusta Chronicle and Sentinel, October 20, 1847. The final official casualty figures were slightly lower than Freaner's first report stated.
21. Ibid.
22. New Orleans Delta, October 15, 1847.

23. New Orleans Picayune, October 14, 1847.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. For a discussion of the dispute over Chapultepec's defense see Los Angeles Times, February 1, 1975.
27. For the reports on Chapultepec's capture see New Orleans Picayune, October 14, 1847; New Orleans Delta, October 15, 1847.
28. New Orleans Picayune, October 14, 1847.
29. Ibid.
30. Quoted in Augusta Chronicle and Sentinel, October 20, 1847.
31. Ibid.
32. New Orleans Delta, October 15, 1847.
33. Ibid.
34. New Orleans Picayune, October 15, 1847.
35. Ibid., November 30, 1847.
36. New Orleans Delta, October 15, 1847.
37. Ibid., October 23, 1847. The Delta reprinted the Freaner item from the Arco Iris after having it translated back to English. See Ibid., October 26, 1847.
38. New Orleans Picayune and Delta, September 26, 1847.
39. New Orleans Picayune, September 26, 1847.
40. New Orleans Delta, September 26, 1847.
41. New Orleans Picayune, September 26, 1847.
42. Charleston Courier, September 29, 1847.
43. Ibid., October 2, 1847.
44. New Orleans Picayune and Delta, September 26, 1847.
45. Charleston Courier, October 1, 1847.
46. Washington Union, October 3, 1847.

47. Ibid.
48. Ibid., October 5, 1847.
49. New Orleans Picayune, October 5, 1847.
50. See Washington Union, October 6, 1847.
51. New Orleans Picayune, October 14, 1847.
52. Charleston Courier, October 12, 1847.
53. New Orleans Picayune and Delta, October 14,15, 1847.
54. Washington Union, October 20, 1847.
55. Ibid., October 21, 1847.
56. Ibid. Trist and Scott had offered some initial cash payments to the Mexican government in an effort to speed the start of negotiations.
57. Ibid., October 23, 1847.
58. Ibid.
59. New Orleans Picayune, October 21, 1847.
60. Ibid., November 2,25, December 5, 1847.
61. Washington Union, December 4, 1847.
62. Ibid.
63. See New Orleans Delta, September 12, 1847.
64. From Richmond Times, quoted in Delta, December 30, 1847.
65. New Orleans Picayune, December 14, 1847.
66. Ibid., January 5, 1848.
67. Ibid., January 9, 1848.
68. Ibid., February 13, 1848.
69. Copeland, Kendall of the Picayune, op. cit., Chap. 21. Kendall's primary purpose in going to Europe was to start work on an illustrated history of the Mexican war. The publication, War Between the United States and Mexico, Illustrated (New York: Appleton) was published in 1851 in conjunction with artist Carl Nebel, who did color engravings for it.

## CHAPTER 17

### THE YANKEE PRESS IN MEXICO CITY

With the fighting over, the news from Mexico quickly dropped off. "We are sadly deficient in the great staple article and 'staff of life' — news," complained the New Orleans correspondent of the Charleston Courier.<sup>1</sup> The army now settled in for an eight-month occupation of the Mexican capital while the diplomats tried to find a peace table at which to officially end the war. It was clear there would be no fighting, at least for a while, but the overall question of whether there was to be peace or war remained unanswered. Although Kendall believed the major fighting was over, and had returned to the States, the rest of the press corps remained at Mexico City. In less than a week after the fighting ended, it was once again doing what it had gone to Mexico to do — gathering and publishing news about the army and its personnel.

After Scott had reached the temporary armistice with the Mexicans following Contreras and Churubusco, John Peoples, the intrepid printer and correspondent, unexpectedly found himself the first American to enter the Mexican capital. Having signed the truce agreement with the Mexicans, Scott wanted to have copies printed for distribution among his troops. Peoples

volunteered to accompany several Mexican officers secretly into the city at night and print the document. Arrangements were made at a Mexican newspaper office to set the English-language message, and the copies were struck off on the paper's regular press. Accompanied by the Mexican officers Peoples retraced his steps through the city streets, which he noted "were filled with excited people," and delivered the printed proclamations to Scott at his headquarters in Tucabaya.<sup>2</sup>

Scott had not forgotten Peoples' service to the army with the operation of his war papers during the march inland from Vera Cruz. The general soon helped the printer start yet another American Star, this time at the Mexican capital. By September 20, 1847, six days after the end of the fighting, Peoples' first issue was out. "The flag of our country had not yet become easy in its new position on the National Palace before our Star was out announcing the success of our arms," Peoples said.<sup>3</sup> It started as a bi-weekly, then became tri-weekly, and finally, on October 12, a daily. Working with Peoples in the new enterprise was J.R. Barnard, his associate from the other war papers.<sup>4</sup>

Scott's support for the paper came in the form of official printing contracts and supplying army personnel to help publish it. The army still was in need of official forms, Peoples soon found, and he reported "for one month we worked incessantly to furnish the different departments with blank forms and other printing."<sup>5</sup> Despite its income from the army printing, the Star never was financially secure, and at one point Peoples and

Barnard had to appeal to their subscribers and advertisers to pay their \$2,500 to \$3,000 in back bills in order for the paper to continue publication.<sup>6</sup>

Before long the city had a second American newspaper. With its strong support from Scott, and with Peoples' own predilections, the Star was strongly pro-Whig. It soon became evident to the Democrats in the army that they would have to have a newspaper outlet too. On September 29, 1847, the pro-Democratic North American began publication, edited by the talented writer from the Philadelphia North American, William C. Tobey. Although it also attempted a daily schedule, the North American's appearance was less regular, appearing 77 times between September 29, 1847, and March 31, 1848, when it terminated publication.<sup>7</sup> It survived long enough, however, to conduct a running six-month editorial war with the opposition Star.

The American papers in Mexico City were an instant hit with the press back home. The Star, the Picayune proclaimed, "is edited with intelligence, spirit and judgment."<sup>8</sup> When Peoples visited the New Orleans paper during a business trip in December, 1847, the Picayune said the Star was the best war paper yet, "abounding in information."<sup>9</sup> The Philadelphia North American was obviously pleased with Tobey's new publication: "Its looks do great credit to the typographical arts in our sister republic. Mr. Tobey has the ability to make a good paper and we wish him all success."<sup>10</sup> An editorial item in the St. Louis Reveille praised Tobey "as an enterprising and vivacious fellow...a



utilitarian." The paper also expressed its thanks to him for forwarding files of the North American for its use.<sup>11</sup>

The new papers also proved convenient to the correspondents at Mexico City. In February, 1848, the Picayune's Scully sent a batch of clippings from the Star, telling the New Orleans paper, "You will find in the enclosed extracts from the Star all the news worth mentioning."<sup>12</sup> As a result, the New Orleans dailies reprinted large portions of the Star and the North American, and in turn the rest of the nation's press reprinted portions of that material from the New Orleans papers. The New Orleans papers made such heavy use of the two papers, in fact, that when the Washington Union received a one-month file of the North American on one occasion it observed, "They have been so much gleaned by the New Orleans papers as to leave us very little to select."<sup>13</sup>

Peoples brought to his role at the Star much of the drive and skill of the Stateside editors. His news sense is best illustrated by his handling of Polk's annual Presidential message in December, 1847. Since it would be a clear indicator of the government's future plans regarding the war, there was wide interest in it at Mexico City. Peoples made a special trip to the coast and arranged for an express rider to carry it to Mexico City.<sup>14</sup> The rider took 70 hours to reach the capital, arriving Christmas Day, 1847. It had taken 17 days for the message to go from Washington to the Mexican capital. The Star printed it at length in an extra edition the next morning. Peoples thus

duplicated the intense efforts of New York and Boston editors of the period to rush presidential messages into print.<sup>15</sup>

Another important news feature of the Star was its publication of Mexican news. Peoples made arrangements to receive copies of Mexican papers published in many of the cities where American troops were not quartered, in order to gauge the "war or peace" sentiment. This also made the Star popular with the American press, and Tobey was careful to add this coverage to the North American. Also popular with the editors back home was a long series of intercepted Mexican letters Peoples printed, describing the demoralized conditions in Mexico City prior to its capture.<sup>17</sup>

In February, 1848 Peoples added a weekly edition of the Star, specifically designed for soldiers to mail home. The addition showed Peoples was "a talented editor and businessman," the New Orleans Delta stated.<sup>18</sup> The weekly edition of the Star was priced at \$7 annually, mailed to Vera Cruz and the States. Peoples and Barnard took out advertisements in the New Orleans newspapers to publicize the new weekly, and arranged for an agent there to accept advertising and subscription orders.<sup>19</sup> Competition for the soldiers' money was brisk in the occupied city, and the pages of the war papers were soon filled with advertisements from various dance halls, the National Theatre, William Forrest's Saloon, the Bella Union, Z. Hubbard's Custom House, C. Wagner's Ball Room and the Pinon Jockey Club.<sup>20</sup> Another advertisement appearing in the Star was placed by an agent for

Phineas T. Barnum, seeking "relics of war, military trophies, etc." It promised to place donors' names in the exhibit and to allow them free passes to the museum good for three years.<sup>21</sup>

In addition to its service to the Americans, it was clear Peoples considered the Star a means of influencing Mexican public opinion.<sup>22</sup> He was particularly proud of the paper's Spanish-language articles and hired a Mexican journalist on a full-time basis to handle them. Peoples explained:

We have, in their own language, communed with the people of Mexico, and sought to elevate their ideas, in order that they might look into their own condition, and there behold how requisite were certain reforms in their social and political condition in order to preserve their nationality.<sup>23</sup>

During the paper's eight months in Mexico City it carried a number of articles urging the population to make "an honorable peace" with the Americans and to reform the country's army and clergy. Such information, Peoples believed, would allow the American press to help complete the conquest which had been started by the army.<sup>24</sup>

His views did not always sit well with the city's Mexican press, which the Americans had allowed to continue publishing. Peoples found himself in a controversy with the native population when he commented on the beauty of its women. The Delta's Frenner explained that Peoples, "being a verdant youth, and full of life, took the liberty of expressing through his paper, his admiration for the 'softer sex' in terms highly complementary." Two Mexican newspapers in the city, El Monitor and The Eagle observing

"flattery from an enemy is an insult to their patriotism." The criticism, Freamer said, had gotten "up the dander" of Peoples, whom he described as "rather good looking and amiable." In reply to the Mexican papers Peoples wrote "that he not only admires (the women) but that he dotes upon all the pretty women of the country and is determined to worship at their shrine of beauty."<sup>25</sup> This did not end the dispute, and during most of the occupation period the city's papers sparred with the Star and North American. In his final issue before leaving Mexico City Peoples noted, "The native press has assumed a bold and independent tone, and many of them are now advocating the very reforms which we long ago suggested." Part of it, he felt, was due to the Star's influence.<sup>26</sup>

There were a number of mechanical problems for the Star throughout its eight-month life, even with the support of General Scott. Its paper had to be purchased long distances from the capital, usually Puebla or San Angel. Type, although in good supply in the city, was expensive. And its printers, mostly soldiers, were subject to the whims and duty requirements of their unit commanders.<sup>27</sup>

Besides supplying advertising, job printing and printers, Scott made another important contribution to the Star. He arranged for John H. Warland, an experienced Massachusetts journalist serving as a quartermaster sergeant in the 9th Infantry (New England volunteers), to be assigned to the paper as its editor. This arrangement freed Peoples from the day-to-day

editorial responsibility and allowed him to concentrate on the business and production aspects of the publication. Warland, an 1827 graduate of Harvard College, was from Lowell, Massachusetts. He had served on Lowell and Boston newspapers before joining the volunteers headed for Mexico. While working on the Star, Warland also served as a correspondent for the daily Boston Atlas.<sup>28</sup>

Warland was quite conscious of the growing North vs. South rift among the Americans in the army. There was constant tension over this issue, he said, because so many of the officers were Southerners, while many of the enlisted personnel were from Northern states. This issue caused problems for Warland, an outspoken New Englander. When Scott arranged to have Warland assigned to duty at the Star it was handled as a verbal command. Later, when Warland's unit was assigned to an outlying area, the sergeant-editor assumed his editing duties relieved him of the necessity of accompanying it. His commanding officer, Colonel John M. Withers, a West Pointer from Virginia, assumed otherwise, and objected to the informal arrangement. The dispute reached a climax when Warland wrote and printed a long poem on the Star's front page titled "The Spirit of New England." Its theme was that no one could break the spirit of a New Englander. The colonel apparently got the point. He had Warland reduced in rank, listed as a deserter, and sent troops to arrest him. Warned by friends, Warland managed to be "out of the way" when they arrived. At this point Scott intervened and gave Warland's editing position official sanction.<sup>29</sup>

Peoples did not immediately take sides in a growing feud among the American generals. (Discussed in Chapter 19) Peoples was particularly distressed that the dispute was distracting from the overall achievement of the army. The cause of it all, he believed, were a "few individuals, eager for power, and desirous of creating a first impression at home." Officers' letters written to newspapers at home were "evil," Peoples concluded, and decided to resist reprinting all of them.<sup>30</sup>

He soon found he had enemies in both the Whig and Democratic camps. "A league was started to crush our paper," he wrote, "to crush it because they could not use it." The opposition's tactics were political and financial. "The little support with which they favored us was withdrawn, and a heavy influence exerted to induce others to withhold that patronage with which we kept afloat," Peoples stated. Scott, however, kept his influence behind Peoples, and the editor held on.<sup>31</sup> Although Peoples benefitted from Scott's patronage for more than six months, he attempted to keep his paper "on a free and independent course," as he described it. In order to meet his goal, he explained, "Our studied course was to draw no parallel line between individuals or corps, but to award to all that abundant glory and honor which was the due of the whole army."<sup>32</sup> The exaltations and comradeship of victory were shortlived, and within weeks events were to cause disruption, turmoil, haggling and even hatred among the generals, the army and the press.

The main weapon used against the Star was the rival North

American. Although continually in financial trouble, Tobey, whom the Delta described as "a practical printer and one of the most piquant writers in the country," put up a good fight.<sup>33</sup> The North American's style was more literary than that of the Star. One of Tobey's regular items was a feature column called "Side-walks Musings" in which he related his impressions of the Mexican city. It was written in the personality sketch style popular with the Philadelphia papers. Frenner thought the column "a literary gem."<sup>34</sup> Assisting Tobey with the editing chores for a period was Captain Mayne Reid, a New Yorker later noted as a writer of children's literature.<sup>35</sup> Frenner, according to one source, also was offered an editor's position on the paper, but declined.<sup>36</sup>

Tobey had made his politics clear in a number of his letters to the pro-Whig North American at Philadelphia.<sup>37</sup> He was not so much pro-Polk or pro-Administration as he was pro-army, somewhat in the same manner as the New Orleans correspondents. "We care nothing for Mr. Polk, as a man, and if he does wrong we shall not be behind any in avowing it when the proper time comes," he wrote. But, he continued, "Whether the war is right or wrong this is not the time to discuss it." The problem, as Tobey saw it, was that the anti-war and "ultra abolitionist Presses and people in our Eastern states give (the Mexicans) great confidence...and extravagant notions...." As a result, he said, the war was being prolonged. It was wrong in his opinion because the army was being endangered by what the Mexicans conceived to be

strong opposition in Washington to Polk's policies. In an emotional tone, Tobey argued:

ANTI-WAR FOLKS! -- There are now in Mexico many thousands of your fellow citizens, who, at the call of their and your Government, left homes, kindred, all that was comfortable and productive of happiness on earth, to sustain the decrees of that Government, and the honor of the Nation.... If wrong (the war) must be brought to an honorable termination, and to do this all should be united.<sup>38</sup>

Continuing this emotional appeal, he wrote:

The people we war against need not your encouragement to lay in wait for your brothers and murder them with lasso and machette. They need not your pious curses upon our heads to incite them to hatred of everything American. We should have your aid and support; we need your encouragement to sustain us in the trials and hardships we encounter in this unfriendly climate. Our love of country and our patriotic impulses made us fly to the rescue of our flag at the first call, and we can bear all the burden war imposes without murmuring; but we cannot brook your cold sneers at our sufferings, and your hypocritical prayers for our defeat.<sup>39</sup>

The answer, Tobey believed, was for the country to pull together until the war was won, the troops brought safely home, then "if you want to flog Mr. Polk go ahead, but do not cut our throats in the doing of it...."<sup>40</sup>

Tobey also continued to write occasional articles for the Philadelphia North American while serving as editor of the Mexico City North American. But he appears to have suffered more trouble with his mail than any of the other correspondents, and the reports only appeared three times during his last seven months at the Mexican capital.<sup>41</sup> (His letters took 10 weeks to reach Philadelphia.) He had heard so seldom from the Philadelphia



editors he asked in one letter, "Did you, like others, put me down with the list of the 'planted' — as the soldiers say...?"<sup>42</sup> He explained at one point that he was unable to continue to write regular correspondence because he "had not spare time to write" due to his editing duties.<sup>43</sup>

Tobey warned the Philadelphia paper to be careful of reports in other American papers that the Mexicans and Americans were getting along well in the capital. "Our gentlemen correspondents," he wrote, "with a complacency that is really enviable destroy something of truth, and a great deal of foolscap, in describing (Mexican affairs), yet draw all their materials from fancy." Only the lower classes of the Mexican people were dealing with the Americans, Tobey claimed, and that was primarily for business purposes. As for himself, he told his editors, "I shall portray Mexico as it is...."<sup>44</sup> His editing and military assignments apparently took most of his time, however, for he sent few reports back to the States during his final year in the country.

In mid-February, 1848, Scully of the Picayune reported "some important changes" had been made in the American press in the Mexican capital. Barnard "had retired" from the Star, "which is now owned and edited by Mr. Peoples exclusively," he reported, adding, "The paper continues to be conducted with its usual industry and ability." The North American had been discontinued briefly, Scully said, but was reopened with Charles Callahan, the Picayune's other Mexico correspondent, joining Tobey as a partner.

Scully praised Callahan as a "talented and intelligent correspondent." Tobey and Callahan would produce a good paper, he predicted, "and if they do not I shall be disappointed."<sup>45</sup> The Picayune, joined in the high praise of Callahan's work as one of its Mexico correspondents, and said of the North American:

(It) evinces a determination on the part of the proprietors to make it a readable and interesting sheet, and we are quite sure that industry and perseverance will enable them to secure an extended patronage.<sup>46</sup>

Tobey and Callahan were not able to persevere, however, and the North American published its final issue on March 31. Its poor luck stayed right to the end: During the final week of operation its office was burglarized, causing the paper to speculate, "The robbery must have been perpetrated by Mexicans, as a robbery of a newspaper office could scarcely have entered the head of an American."<sup>47</sup> Scully explained the closing: "I regret to say that that excellent paper, the North American, has been stopped, for the reason many a paper has died at home -- want of patronage."<sup>48</sup> Tobey, with no other newspaper opportunities at hand, accepted a commission as a second lieutenant in the 4th Infantry, the Pennsylvania volunteer unit. "He deserves it well," Scully commented, praising the Philadelphia writer as a "pioneer of the American press in Mexico" and a veteran "of all of the battles of this Valley."<sup>49</sup>

When the news reached New Orleans that the North American had folded, the Delta and Picayune joined in praising Tobey's contribution to the reporting of the war. The Picayune expressed

"regret" at the North American's closing, but said it was happy to see that its "able and Patriotic editor" had been appointed as a second lieutenant.<sup>50</sup> Several days later, again referring to the North American's contribution, the Picayune called it "an excellent journal" and stated Callahan was "quite deserving of an army commission" too.<sup>51</sup> Instead, he returned to writing for the Picayune.<sup>52</sup> The military commission apparently assured Tobey the means of returning to the States. He held it from March 3, 1848, until July 31, 1848, resigning after the 4th Infantry had returned to Philadelphia.<sup>53</sup>

In addition to the two dailies there were other attempts by other Americans to publish at Mexico City. In mid-November, 1847, Callahan reported, "There are now four papers published in this city in English." Besides the Star and the North American, two weeklies, Yankee Doodle and Rover had been established. Yankee Doodle, named after a New York City humor weekly of the same title, began publication on November 18, 1847. It was edited by H.R. Courtney.<sup>54</sup> Frenner of the New Orleans Delta commented, "The Yankee Doodle, full of mirth and humor, pokes his comical face from around a corner weekly." Callahan described it as "a humorous affair," but it proved to be short-lived, surviving only six weeks.<sup>55</sup> Rover's life-span apparently was even shorter, as the American correspondents made no further reference to it after the first number.<sup>56</sup>

In March, 1848 plans were announced for a third American daily in the Mexican capital. William Jewell (also occasionally

referred to as R.G.W. Jewell), who had participated with Peoples and Barnard in the operation of the American Eagle at Vera Cruz, was the promoter of the proposed publication. He ran advertisements for the paper, also to be called the American Eagle, in the New Orleans papers, scheduling April 15, 1848 as its starting date. The paper was to print daily, he announced, and have a tri-weekly edition as well. He appealed to advertisers and subscribers around the United States to use the proposed paper. Endorsing his effort, the Delta stated, "We, in common with the editorial fraternity in the 'states,' have often been indebted to (Jewell) for war news."<sup>57</sup> The Picayune also supported Jewell's plans, commenting, "Mr. Jewell is no novice at the business; on the contrary, he is one of the pioneers of the American press in Mexico, and will issue such a sheet as will be sought after by the army."<sup>58</sup> The rapid winding down of the war prevented Jewell's publication from coming into existence.

While the Star and North American were attempting to survive in Mexico City, several American papers were started in outlying areas. In March, 1848 the Picayune reported it had received the first issue of The Outpost Guard published at Toluca, a small town near the capital where an American unit was stationed. The paper, printed in English and Spanish like its contemporaries, was published by H.R. Courtney, who had attempted to operate Yankee Doodle.<sup>59</sup>

Another small American paper which survived through Winter 1847-48 was the Flag of Freedom at Puebla. It was operated

by John Kritser of the Pennsylvania Volunteer Regiment, another unit with a large number of printers.<sup>60</sup> It printed twice a week between October 20 and December 25, 1847, and then weekly until March 4, 1848. One of the steady contributors to the publication was a former Philadelphia Public Ledger reporter, William F. Small, who was a captain in the Pennsylvania regiment. Small also was a minor poet at the time, signing his poems in the Flag of Freedom "W.F.S."<sup>61</sup> The withdrawal of the American forces in Spring, 1848 provided enough income for an American paper to survive a short time at Jalapa. The paper, The Watch Tower, was printed and edited by John Shea, yet another of the enterprising New Orleans printers. The Picayune called it a "fine looking paper, superior in appearance to most of the Yankee papers started among the Mexicans."<sup>62</sup> However, it lasted only a short time: March 12 to April 2, 1848. The contribution of the American papers, particularly the Star and the North American, was an important one. In the final issue of the Star on May 30 Peoples explained:

With this number ends the American Star.  
Peace is made and ratified, and with its coming  
ends our mission here. The deed is done. The  
Star, which has risen in every city occupied by  
our arms on this line, has set for the last time  
in the capital of those, who, but a few days since,  
ranked on our list of enemies. May there never be  
a cause for another rupture between us. The Star  
has advocated an honorable peace — it has been  
brought about. We are satisfied — our country  
is satisfied — Mexico is satisfied — may peace  
rest continually with all....<sup>64</sup>

As for himself, Peoples wrote, "if the gallant soldiers think occasionally of him who followed you from battle to battle and

raised his Star to chronicle your deeds of glory, it will be consolation enough...."<sup>65</sup> After receiving the last copy of the Star from Mexico City, the New Orleans Crescent commented, "We can scarcely award too much praise to Mr. Peoples for the enterprise which he has displayed throughout the war." Peoples contributed more than any other writer, the paper said, to general public understanding about the war and the performance of the American army. "On this account, the history of the war will be much better understood," it concluded.<sup>66</sup>

One of the most valuable functions of the American journalists during the war was to keep American public opinion, at home and in Mexico, aware of conditions and issues. The American press often was the channel by which officials in Washington and Mexico City learned of actions in the other capital. For the general public, it was the only communication link. The establishment of the American Star and the North American was somewhat the logical conclusion of the push by the American printers to follow the army into Mexico. Out of a mixture of motives — patriotism, politics, professional news sense and desire of personal gain — they established their papers in the Mexican cities. Their existence helped Americans of the 1840s to better understand the war, and, as the Crescent prophesied, they now allow the history of the war to be much better understood.

## NOTES

1. Charleston Courier, October 27, 1847.
2. Mexico City American Star, May 30, 1848, quoted in New Orleans Crescent, June 16, 1848.
3. Ibid.
4. Lota M. Spell, "The Anglo-Saxon Press in Mexico, 1846-1848," op. cit., pp. 26-7. During their association of the paper Barnard and Peoples ran it jointly for a period, and each took turns running it separately. They ran it jointly until December, 1847, then Barnard took it until February, 1848. Peoples was the editor-publisher thereafter.
5. Mexico City American Star, May 30, 1848.
6. Spell, op. cit., p. 27.
7. Ibid.
8. New Orleans Picayune, October 14,15, 1847.
9. Ibid., December 29, 1847.
10. Philadelphia North American, November 15, 1847.
11. St. Louis Reveille, November 17, December 4, 1847. Also see New Orleans Delta, November 6, 1847, for favorable comment on Tobey.
12. New Orleans Picayune, March 8, 1848.
13. Washington Union, January 11, 1848.
14. New Orleans Picayune, December 23,29, 1847.
15. Ibid., January 14,20, 1848.
16. Ibid., March 30, 1848.
17. New Orleans Delta, November 6, 1847.
18. Ibid., January 6, February 13, 1848.
19. New Orleans Crescent, March 6, 1848.
20. Edward S. Wallace, "The United States Army in Mexico City," Military Affairs, XIII (Fall 1949) 3: 158-66.

21. Ibid., p. 163.
22. Spell, op. cit., p. 26.
23. Mexico City American Star, May 30, 1848.
24. Spell, op. cit., p. 26.
25. New Orleans Delta, November 12, 1847.
26. Mexico City American Star, May 30, 1848.
27. Spell, op. cit., p. 26.
28. Edward S. Wallace, General William Jenkins Worth, Monterey's Forgotten Hero, (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1953) pp. 180-222.
29. Edward S. Wallace, Destiny and Glory, (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1957) pp. 25-6.
30. Mexico City American Star, May 30, 1848.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. New Orleans Delta, November 6, 1847.
34. Ibid., November 12, 1847. Also see Delta, February 16, 1848, for republication of Tobey's articles.
35. Edward S. Wallace, General William Jenkins Worth...., op. cit., p. 180.
36. Spell, op. cit., p. 27.
37. Philadelphia North American, June 4, 1847.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid. Interestingly, some Stateside Democratic newspapers attacked Tobey after this article was printed, calling him a "striped" or "bogus" Democrat. Ibid., December 22, 1847.
41. See Ibid., December 30, 1847; April 3, June 14, 1848.
42. Ibid., April 3, 1848.



43. Ibid.
44. Ibid.
45. New Orleans Picayune, March 23, 1848.
46. Ibid., March 24, 1848.
47. Ibid., April 23, 1848.
48. Ibid.
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid., April 14, 1848.
51. Ibid., April 23, 1848.
52. Ibid.
53. Francis B. Heitman, Historical Register and Dictionary of the U.S. Army, 1787-1903, (2 vols.; Washington: Government Printing Office, 1903) I: 963. Also see Philadelphia North American, August 15, 1848.
54. New Orleans Picayune, December 18, 1847.
55. Ibid.
56. Spell, op. cit., p. 28.
57. New Orleans Delta, March 21, April 14, 1848.
58. New Orleans Picayune, March 21, 1848.
59. Ibid., March 28, 1848; Spell, op. cit., p. 28.
60. Ibid., p. 27.
61. Ibid.
62. New Orleans Picayune, April 14, 1848.
63. Spell, op. cit., p. 29.
64. Mexico City American Star, May 30, 1848.
65. Ibid.
66. New Orleans Crescent, June 16, 1848.

## CHAPTER 18

### MUSTANG DELIVERS THE TREATY

On the night of February 19, 1848, Secretary of State James Buchanan was working in his study when he heard a commotion at the front door between his porter and another man. Going to the scene he was confronted by what he thought was "an old salt." The man before him sported a blue jacket and pants, one leg of which was strapless while "the want of suspenders displayed a fold of check linen over the waistband," a broad brimmed tarpaulin hat was on his head, and the face was covered with "ran- chero looking whiskers." The man, tired and dirty from 17 days of continuous travel, was James L. Freaner, "Mustang" of the New Orleans Delta. To Buchanan's further surprise, Freaner handed to him the treaty ending the Mexican War.<sup>1</sup>

President Polk had told the American public that the Mexican War was being fought "to conquer a peace."<sup>2</sup> In the end a peace settlement proved almost as tough "to conquer" as the Mexican armies. Mexican War historian Justin Smith noted, "No- body could have imagined the extraordinary course of events that was to bring (peace) about, and for a long while it seemed impos- sible."<sup>3</sup> The peace treaty also set off an "extraordinary course of events" for the press — events which saw Freaner set off on

a 1700-mile trip to deliver the document to the President of the United States, while at the same time the competition Picayune was covering the same ground to deliver the news to the people of the United States.

The events leading to the treaty were Byzantine, at best. After the capture of Mexico City, Nicholas Trist, the State Department clerk Polk had sent to Mexico to work out the peace, could not find a stable Mexican government to negotiate with. U.S. Senator Daniel Webster summed up the situation: "Mexico... will not fight — she will not treat."<sup>4</sup>

In mid-November, 1847 Trist was finally beginning to make some headway, when word arrived from a dissatisfied President Polk relieving him of his assignment and recalling him to Washington immediately. Since the next safe convoy to the coast was not scheduled until December 4, and the Mexican authorities were anxious to start negotiations, Trist decided to continue his assignment in defiance of the President's orders.<sup>5</sup> For another two months he persisted in face of a number of obstacles in the tenuous Mexican political situation, until finally the Mexican government yielded to the American terms. On February 2, 1848, in total secrecy, late at night, Trist met with the Mexican representatives at Guadalupe Hidalgo, a Mexico City suburb, and signed the tentative agreement. He then turned the American copy over to his trusted friend and supporter, Freaner, for delivery to President Polk.<sup>6</sup>

Freaner found himself in the awkward position of

delivering the treaty after spending months encouraging Trist to persist with the negotiations, despite the recall order. Trist later gave Freaner credit as "the only man who had been in any way instrumental in determining (Trist) to make the attempt."<sup>7</sup> Trist, after long months of close association with Freaner, had arrived at the conclusion that the correspondent was "an honest man of unusual sagacity...(with) a strong, sympathetic character."<sup>8</sup> Whatever their exact relationship, the reporter encouraged Trist to continue the negotiations, and when they succeeded the State Department representative asked Freaner to undertake the difficult job of delivering the agreement to the unsuspecting, perplexed President back in Washington. Ironically, however, although Trist had handed him one of the news scoops of the war, the Delta correspondent apparently felt honor-bound to keep it a secret, and in the chain of events that followed, his paper was scooped by the Picayune.

\* \* \* \* \*

After the fighting ended, and long after the Picayune's Kendall had returned to the States, Freaner was still sending his long, almost daily accounts from Mexico City. His national reputation had grown considerably as a result of his reporting of the battles at Mexico City. Headlines such as "Mustang's Letters," "Mustang at Mexico City" and "Letters from Mr. Freaner," could be found in many American newspapers.<sup>9</sup> Despite the end of the fighting, Freaner found many things to write about. Earthquakes had become a common occurrence, he reported to the Delta, noting

they produced "much fright."<sup>10</sup> The growing arguments among the American generals bothered him greatly and he supported Scott in a number of his letters, fretting, "These disputes will no doubt be a fruitful theme for some of the political papers at home."<sup>11</sup> On another occasion he reported a long list of Americans who had died in the military hospital at Mexico City.<sup>12</sup>

Freaner also took steps to obtain reports on the activities of the Mexican government at Queretaro, where it had fled after the Mexico City evacuation. He arranged for a Mexican reporter to write to him twice a week and for an express line to deliver items to Mexico City. The Mexican Congress was attempting to convene, and, Freaner noted, "Their proceedings will be of a highly important character to American people."<sup>13</sup> Referring back to the problems of communicating his stories regarding the final battles, he urged the Delta to take steps to see that his letters were not detained at Vera Cruz.<sup>14</sup> Freaner also made arrangements to receive letters from correspondents at other Mexican cities, including those with token American garrisons, in an effort to gauge public opinion.<sup>15</sup>

By mid-December Freaner was openly supporting Trist in his efforts to conclude a peace. Reporting that the Mexican commissioners had come to Mexico City to meet with Trist, Freaner said, "I hope for the interests of our country, that he will, if he is so enabled, go home with the treaty in his pocket." Freaner concluded, "Not only the interests of our country, but the interests of the world and the preservation of the honor of our gallant

little army who labored so hard and accomplished so much, requires it...." Success by Trist, Freaner believed, "will prevent the necessity of extending our military line of operations at great trouble and expense another 500 miles."<sup>16</sup>

Freaner was clearly aware of the danger of keeping a large American army so deep in a foreign country. He noted it took only an army of 12,000 to conquer the country, but would take 100,000 men, "with all the dangers of dull garrison life," to hold it. He argued: "Mexico is degraded in the eyes of the world, its army non-existent, we should therefore fall back on our base of operations, keep a limited number of occupation troops" and "have our government negotiate a peace." If the Mexicans failed to negotiate, he said, "let's set up our own boundaries, man them, and let any aggravated power drive us from our position if they can."<sup>17</sup> The Delta correspondent also believed a large standing army would be a threat to "American republicanism." He wrote "evils and corruptions will grow up in the army" if it were forced to continue the occupation. Further, he said, it was not necessary to keep the army there because:

Beyond all doubt or question the Anglo Saxon race will eventually possess and govern Mexico. The fertile land, rich mines and good climate is enough to ensure this....Progress will determine this eventually.<sup>18</sup>

Strong opinions such as these characterized Freaner's reporting during this period. When compared to the writing of the other American correspondents in Mexico, however, it is not unusual. Most of them were firm in their convictions that the

Americans should be tough in the negotiations with the Mexicans. But Freaner's strong statements sometimes embarrassed the Delta. On one occasion, when Freaner called Polk's annual message of December, 1847, "lame and inferior" to his previous messages, the Delta quickly explained, "Our readers will make all due allowances for this opinion of our correspondent when they bear in mind that he is a warm advocate of taking a defensive line and of the withdrawal of our troops from the interior of Mexico."<sup>19</sup> Slowly, but surely, Trist continued to push the negotiations forward, encouraged at each step by Freaner. The diplomat's effort finally culminated about midnight on February 2, 1848. Within hours Freaner was on his way to the coast, carrying the treaty in his saddlebags.<sup>20</sup> The treaty terms required the United States to pay Mexico \$15,000,000, assume the numerous claims of American citizens against the Mexican government (about \$22,000,000) and assume responsibility for Indian damages. In exchange, Mexico ceded New Mexico and California and accepted the Rio Grande as the boundary of Texas.<sup>21</sup>

It is interesting to note that after Freaner's departure for Washington, the correspondents in Mexico City and Vera Cruz continued to know little of the treaty's exact details. Trist, Freaner and the leading military authorities in Mexico apparently decided to keep the exact details secret there until the document reached the President. (Ironically, in Washington a reporter for the New York Herald, John Nugent, was "leaked" the details of the secret agreement and broke the story before the Senate ratified

it.)<sup>22</sup>

In a letter to the New Orleans Crescent the paper's Mexico correspondent, John Peoples, complained, "We are wholly ignorant of the extent of Mr. Trist's powers."<sup>23</sup> Peoples' Mexico City paper, the American Star, on February 13, 1848, noted the city's Mexican journals were the only source of news regarding the document. "Probably there is as much known in the United States in regard to this treaty as in this city," the Star reported. The Mexican accounts of the settlement which the paper reprinted were, however, generally accurate. "We have taken some pains to ascertain the sentiments of the army on (such a peace) and we believe 2/3rds are favorable to an honorable peace," the Star stated. It added, "In other words they are ready to sustain the Administration in its well-directed efforts to secure the attainment of this great object."<sup>24</sup>

The lack of precise details didn't stop the Mexico correspondents from speculating on the contents. The Picayune's Scully, writing from Mexico City at about the time Freaner was delivering the treaty to Buchanan in Washington, noted, "The only topic here now is Peace. At every meeting the question is 'Will we have Peace?'"<sup>25</sup> Everyone had a different view, Scully said. "In this conflict of feeling, ambition and interest it is next to impossible to find an unbiased opinion," he wrote. He then demonstrated his own bias regarding the "supposed" agreement which gave the United States California, New Mexico and a boundary at the Rio Grande. "Mexico is satisfied — should we be satisfied?"



he asked. "Mexico wants peace — craves for it, and, if this treaty is not ratified by her it is because of the stupidity and ineptness caused by the oft and repeated blows received by her within the last two years." But Scully had doubts that the agreement was in the best interests of the United States. The real person behind it, he contended, was Ewen C. Mackintosh, British counsel-general in Mexico.<sup>26</sup> Trist had been offered similar terms by the Mexicans after the battles of Contreras and Churubusco the previous August, Scully claimed, but that settlement had been thwarted by Mackintosh. His motives, Scully said, were to lure the Americans into the costly battle of Molino del Rey in hopes of wearing them down.<sup>27</sup> "Truly, we are a generous, a philanthropic people!" Scully wrote mockingly of the treaty's terms, which he considered too light in view of the American casualties. "This thing of being killed or wounded must be a delicious pleasure when we are willing to pay dearly for it."<sup>28</sup>

Scully pushed his opposition even further in another letter from the Mexican capital. "It is humiliating to hear the part public report assigned to the United States in the negotiations of the treaty sent to Washington. The United States were a mere puppet, and the interests of Mr. Trist, Mr. Mackintosh and Mr. Davidson, the agents of the Rothschilds in this city, were of paramount consideration," he contended.<sup>29</sup> They would all benefit, the reporter claimed, by speculation in Mexican bonds, which would rise in value when the treaty's terms were announced. Having accused Trist of involvement in such a scheme, Scully then backed

away: "There is no positive evidence of the truth of the statement in regard to Mr. Trist's connection with the speculation in my hands, but it is affirmed that he is, by officers of high rank — men who would scorn to rob a man of his reputation, and whose political sympathies would lead them to shield him, did not the honor of the country demand his exposure."<sup>30</sup>

Historically there is no evidence or even a hint that Trist ever participated in such a speculation.<sup>31</sup> Scully's motives in making the charge are fairly clear, however, from his writing. Having been closely associated with the army since the previous summer, and a personal friend of a number of the officers, he believed the triumphs of the battlefield were now being negotiated away by the diplomats. "The whole army," Scully wrote to the Picayune, "is indignant at buying a peace and paying for territory that was conquered at the very opening of the war."<sup>32</sup>

Contending his was the "moderate" position on the war settlement, Scully continued:

The road sides are lined with the graves of our friends and countrymen who have fallen by disease, and the battlefields, from which we have driven the enemy, are saturated with our best and bravest blood. We stand in the capital of the enemy; we vainly look in every direction for a foe; we are conquerors, not merely of battlefields and cities, but of a country, and the manes of our fallen companions demand that we shall exercise the right of conquerors. Do these men ask too much?<sup>33</sup>

For its part, the Picayune was not willing to oppose the treaty, assuming it would be accepted by the government. But it refused to edit or tone down Scully's opinions. "So far as we

can judge of the sentiment of the army in Mexico," the paper observed, "our correspondent speaks them much more nearly (sic) than the press at home."<sup>34</sup> But the difference in opinion was important at this juncture. The reporters in Mexico, close to the "front lines," still favored strong action against the Mexicans. But the press at home, with a better view of American public opinion, knew the country had grown either disinterested in or weary of the war.

Freaner, meanwhile, was carrying out his assignment as messenger for the peace treaty. He had changed roles, however, at least in his own mind, and now considered himself a government courier rather than a correspondent for the New Orleans Delta. For the Delta this proved to be an unfortunate set of circumstances, for in his effort to maintain secrecy about the treaty Freaner did not notify the paper that the agreement had been reached. The Picayune, not bound by such restrictions, pursued the story with its usual energy and ended up announcing the news to the nation.

After leaving Mexico City in the dead of night, Freaner covered the 150 miles to the coast in three days, most of it without armed escort.<sup>35</sup> At Vera Cruz the army had made arrangements to have a steamship, the Iris, waiting to carry him to Mobile. The authorities also had arranged to have another ship that was to leave that day for New Orleans, the steamship New Orleans, held in port for 48 hours. This action was taken to prevent private reports of the treaty agreement from reaching the

States before the government courier.<sup>36</sup> It was a wise precaution, from the government's point of view, because the Picayune's messenger carrying the reports from Mexico City had reached Vera Cruz soon after Frenner.

When the New Orleans finally was allowed to leave, two days behind the Iris, its captain, Edward Auld, responded to the challenge and pushed his ship to its capacity power. The effort allowed the New Orleans to reach its destination Saturday afternoon, February 12, about the time the Iris reached Mobile with Frenner on board. An extra issue of the Picayune was soon on the streets, and not long after that the express riders were headed for the North carrying copies of the paper.<sup>37</sup>

The next morning, February 13, the Delta and the Picayune repeated the story that the treaty had been concluded. The latter, in a carefully worded statement, said it was from a highly reliable source.<sup>38</sup> The Delta, at first indicating Frenner had notified the paper in advance regarding his mission, held its comment to one paragraph: "Though we have no definite advices to that effect, we see no impropriety in stating our confidence that Mustang has with him the treaty of peace which has been agreed on between Trist and the Mexican commissioners."<sup>39</sup> Two days later, however, the paper noted ruefully, "Our correspondent, having been unfortunately for us, the bearer of despatches (sic) to Washington, has omitted to write us and we are therefore deprived of our most reliable source of information."<sup>40</sup>

Although Frenner was keeping the purpose of his mission

secret, the press everywhere was reporting his whereabouts.<sup>41</sup> The Iris reached Mobile February 12 and Freaner immediately went ashore, but was spotted by the newspaper reporters. A correspondent for the Charleston Courier wrote, "He was in great haste and seemed to be full of important matter. Attempts were made to 'pump' him, but they failed...."<sup>42</sup> One of the reporters who failed to "pump" Freaner was from the Mobile Daily Advertiser, but he was able to report that "Mustang" boarded the steamboat Montgomery that same night, bound for Montgomery, Alabama.<sup>43</sup>

Freaner reached Charleston on February 17, the same day as the express rider carrying the Picayune extra with the treaty news. Ironically, the Charleston Courier of the following morning (February 18) carried the Picayune's "scoop" and a story that Freaner passed through Charleston "yesterday...and we understand expressed the opinion that there was a strong probability of peace being soon concluded."<sup>44</sup> Freaner, after 17 days of hard travel, reached Washington "after dark" Saturday, February 19. He fulfilled his mission by delivering Trist's treaty and messages to Buchanan, and messages from General Scott to Secretary of War Marcy. In turn, the reports were quickly passed along to the President.<sup>45</sup>

The newspaper accounts of the treaty agreement took an unusual, somewhat confused, route at this point. John Forney, an experienced Washington correspondent for the Philadelphia North American, wrote to his paper on Sunday, February 20, that "Mustang and the news reports via telegraph from the South

reached Washington at the same time."<sup>46</sup> This would have been possible, because the New York to Charleston telegraph link opened on February 16.<sup>47</sup> But no telegraph messages went north from Washington for the next two days. The New York Sun, in an angry editorial the following Tuesday, February 22, blamed the blackout on the government, hinting it was done in the same fashion that the government had delayed the ship carrying the news for two days at Vera Cruz.<sup>48</sup> The Sun further claimed the U.S. Post Office might have been involved in the incident. The paper said its express package with the report had been placed in the hands of postal authorities at Montgomery, Alabama, and they "might have delayed or entirely arrested the delivery of our express packages." The Sun editorial continued that such expresses were "run at a cost of nearly one thousand dollars" and in this instance "we were robbed of all benefit by them."<sup>49</sup>

Instead, the Sun, like the other papers on the Eastern seaboard, received the treaty news via the Baltimore Sun. The pony express messengers carrying the reports for the Baltimore paper had arrived on Sunday, February 20, with copies of the Picayune extra. The next morning the Sun broke the news.<sup>50</sup>

The telegraph quickly moved a summary of it, and most of the major Eastern papers carried that summary, about two-thirds of a column in length, on February 21.<sup>51</sup> The next day the longer Picayune account, carried further north by the pony express, appeared in the Philadelphia and New York papers.<sup>52</sup> Recounting the events, Forney, in a letter to the Philadelphia North American on

February 23, noted, "The telegraph has a fashion of getting out of gear just at the time of most importance to public interests...."<sup>53</sup>

Freaner, meanwhile, had a long interview with the President and met other leading figures at Washington. The Washington correspondent of the Boston Atlas reported "the redoubtable Mustang...has been quite a lion here."<sup>54</sup> The Washington Union's editor, Thomas Ritchie, took the opportunity to hold a long session with Freaner, expressing pleasure at meeting the man "whose letters...have been read with so much gratification by the country at large."<sup>55</sup> Forney, the Philadelphia correspondent, was another who talked to Freaner at the capital. He called him the writer "that Mr. Trist has made a hero." Forney discovered during their conversation that while in Vera Cruz, Freaner had met the government courier carrying the President's order relieving Scott of his command. "What rare extremes do sometime meet!" Forney marveled. "Here were two messengers at the same time in the same city — one bearing to Washington the happy result produced by (Scott's) services and skill, and the other bearing to Mexico the highest mark of disgrace his Government could inflict."<sup>56</sup> Freaner's eventful stay in the capital came to an end on February 25 when Polk appointed him again as a government courier, to carry instructions back to Mexico City.<sup>57</sup>

Although he was unhappy with the circumstances surrounding the Trist treaty, the President decided to pass it on to the Senate for consideration. It was expected that body might turn

it down, but on February 24 former President John Quincy Adams died, and the atmosphere in the capital changed. Adams had served in the House of Representatives for many years after his defeat for reelection, and had become a revered figure in Congress as one of the few remaining links to the earliest days of the republic. He was speaking on the floor of the House when stricken, and lingered in a coma several days before passing away. The country and Congress were caught up in the drama of the event, and by the time the Senate resumed its deliberations the mood of hostility toward Trist's document had passed. On March 10 the Senate ratified the agreement.<sup>58</sup>

Historian John Schroeder has noted that although the agreement was supposedly a secret, the terms were generally known and were widely discussed in the American press.<sup>59</sup> The National Intelligencer, the outspoken critic of the war, paved the way for the position of the Whig press by stating there was more to lose than gain if the treaty was rejected. Sectional conflict, an inflated settlement price and questionable absorption of people "unfit...to sustain a free government" were all involved in accepting the treaty, the Washington paper argued. "But, momentous as these considerations are, we view them as dust in the balance in comparison with those which force themselves upon us, in contemplation of the rejection of the Treaty," the Intelligencer concluded.<sup>60</sup> Another strong Whig voice, Horace Greeley of the New York Tribune, backed this position, and a number of the nation's papers, Whig and Democrat, followed.<sup>61</sup> When Thurlow



Weed's Albany (N.Y.) Evening Journal joined the tide of Whig papers supporting the treaty, the Picayune's Washington correspondent observed, "The President knew that the press would come to his aid and hence he had no objection to let a week pass in consideration of the treaty."<sup>62</sup>

When the news of the Senate's ratification of the treaty arrived, the Picayune was ready to join the rest of the nation in peace, writing:

There is something cheerful in the sound of peace. There is a charm in the word that soothes the chafed and bruised spirit.. Kinder and more charitable thoughts displace the ~~vengeful~~ fancies which usurped the mind of the nation and...the rude impulses which possessed the people. We have heard so much of the cannon's roar that the tinkling bell is a welcome change.<sup>63</sup>

The delivery of the peace treaty to the President provides an interesting look at the state of journalism in the late 1840s. Freaner's decision to take the role of courier instead of a correspondent appears to have been a personal one, based as much on his relationship with Trist as anything. It was a regrettable decision from the standpoint of his paper, the Delta, but understandable in the sense that "personal integrity" and "duty" and "mission" were important human values at the time, and all evidence points to Freaner's having been a person of high integrity. His editors in New Orleans, however, might have wished for at least some indication from him about the story. In effect, they were left to their own devices in obtaining the news, and reported the circumstances as best they could.

On the other hand, the Picayune, not bound by the requests for secrecy or the ethics of a government courier, carried out its journalistic role with a high degree of success. The paper overcame the handicap of being delayed in Vera Cruz two days by government order and its pony express overtook Frenner at Charleston. Whatever time advantage the Administration hoped to achieve through its interference was erased by the growing strength and efficiency of the press in being first to deliver the news. For the Picayune it also was further reinforcement of its record of being the most complete and reliable of the papers involved in the coverage of the war.

## NOTES

1. New Orleans Delta, March 16, 1848.
2. See John Edward Weems, To Conquer A Peace (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1974), pp. 345-450.
3. Smith, op. cit., II: 233. Smith discusses the events leading to peace in Chap. 23.
4. Ibid., II: 235.
5. Ibid., II: 239, 465.
6. Weems, op. cit., p. 446. The Trist-Freaner friendship had developed during the months prior to the fall of Mexico City.
7. Smith, op. cit., II: 465.
8. Ibid.
9. For examples see Augusta (Georgia) Chronicle and Sentinel, November 12, 1847; Philadelphia North American, January 4, 1848; Charleston Courier, January 20, 1848.
10. New Orleans Delta, November 12, 1847; February 16, 1848.
11. Ibid., December 22, 1847.
12. Ibid., January 15, 1848.
13. Ibid., January 14, 1848.
14. Ibid., January 29, 1848.
15. Ibid. The paper said it received regular correspondence from Vera Cruz, Orizaba, Puebla and Queretaro in addition to Freaner at the capitol. Ibid., March 5, 7, 1848.
16. Ibid., December 23, 1847.
17. Ibid., October 19, 1847.
18. Ibid., November 17, 1847.
19. Ibid., January 15, 1848.
20. Washington Union, February 21, 1848.
21. Connor and Faulk, op. cit., pp. 168-9.

22. For the Nugent story, see Frederick B. Marbut, News from the Capital; The Story of Washington Reporting (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1971).
23. New Orleans Crescent, March 30, 1848.
24. American Star, February 13, 1848, quoted in New Orleans Picayune, February 22, 1848.
25. New Orleans Picayune, March 10, 1848.
26. Ibid.
27. Edward S. Wallace, General William Jenkins Worth, Monterey's Forgotten Hero (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1953), Chap. 14.
28. New Orleans Picayune, March 10, 1848.
29. Ibid., March 23, 1848.
30. Ibid.
31. Smith, op. cit., Chap. 23 There is no biography of Trist; Smith though, praises his work on the treaty.
32. New Orleans Picayune, March 23, 1848.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid., March 10, 1848.
35. Washington Union, February 21, 1848.
36. Copeland, Kendall of the Picayune, op. cit., pp. 234-5. See also Charleston Courier, March 6, 1848.
37. Copeland, op. cit., p. 235.
38. There is a possibility, although there is no historical evidence available to authenticate it, that the Picayune's former correspondent C.M. Haile was the source that the paper had so much confidence in regarding the treaty. Haile, an army captain at the time, returned aboard the New Orleans the same day it arrived from Vera Cruz with the report that Freaner was carrying the document to Washington. Freaner and Haile were acquaintances, having met on several occasions at Mexico City prior to the conclusion of the treaty. A number of correspondents saw Freaner at Vera Cruz and knew he was on an important mission, and it does not take too much of a stretch of the imagination to

presume that Haile heard these reports too while waiting for the ship to carry him to New Orleans. Picayune, February 13, 1848.

39. New Orleans Delta, February 13, 1848.

40. Ibid., February 15, 1848.

41. For examples see the Washington Union, February 21, 1848; New Orleans Picayune, February 16, 1848; Charleston Courier, February 17, 18, 1848; New York Sun, February 22, 1848.

42. Charleston Courier, February 17, 1848.

43. Mobile (Alabama) Daily Advertiser, February 14, 1848.

44. Charleston Courier, February 18, 1848.

45. Quaife, Polk Diary, op. cit., III: 345-6.

46. Philadelphia North American, February 22, 1848.

47. Augusta (Georgia) Chronicle and Sentinel, February 17, 1848, quoting Charleston Chronicle of February 16, 1848.

48. New York Sun, February 22, 1848.

49. Ibid.

50. Copeland, op. cit., pp. 237-8.

51. See Philadelphia North American, February 22, 1848, regarding "extras" of February 21.

52. New York Sun, February 22, 1848; Philadelphia North American, February 22, 1848.

53. Philadelphia North American, February 23, 1848.

54. Quoted in the New Orleans Delta, March 16, 1848.

55. Washington Union, February 21, 1848.

56. Philadelphia North American, March 1, 1848.

57. Quaife, Polk Diary, op. cit., III: 357.

58. Smith, op. cit., II: 264-7.

59. John H. Schroeder, Mr. Polk's War (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1973), pp. 157-9.

60. Ibid., p. 157.
61. Ibid.
62. New Orleans Picayune, March 14, 1848.
63. Ibid., March 19, 1848.

## CHAPTER 19

### THE LEONIDAS HOAX

On his return trip to Mexico City Frenner again traveled as an official government courier, but this time he took care to pass through New Orleans to visit the Delta. Frenner needed to see the editors to retrieve the original copy of an important letter which had been written to the paper from Mexico City. He had twice written to the paper's assistant editor, John McGinnis, to hold the original copy for him, and when he visited the Delta office on March 4, 1848, Frenner was happy to find the document waiting for him.<sup>1</sup> The letter, dubbed the "Leonidas Letter," was the central issue in a heated dispute at Mexico City among the army's principal generals -- a dispute which deeply involved the press, and in particular Frenner.

The letter in question had appeared in the Delta on September 10, 1847. Signed "Leonidas," it was mostly a colorful invention, giving Major General Gideon J. Pillow, Polk's former Tennessee law partner whom the President had appointed as a major general although he had virtually no prior military experience, full credit for the victories at Contreras and Churubusco. Among its many overstatements was this one:

He (Pillow) evinced on this, as he has done on other occasions, that masterly military genius and profound knowledge of war, which has astonished so much the mere martinets of the profession....During this great battle, which lasted two days, General Pillow was in command of all the forces engaged, except General Worth's division, and this was not engaged; except in taking the last work. General Scott gave but one order and that was to reinforce General Cadwalader's brigade.<sup>2</sup>

Continuing its misrepresentations, some bordering on the absurd, was a description of Pillow allegedly fighting a hand-to-hand battle with a Mexican officer. Pillow reportedly said:

"Let the honor and prowess of our respective countries be determined by the issue of this combat." Strait-way the Mexican, a large and muscular man attacked with lance and sword, handled his arms with great vigor and skill but our general was his superior in dexterity and coolness. At last the Mexican made one terrible charge at our general with his lance, which the latter evaded with great promptitude and avidity, using his sword, tossed the weapon of the Mexican high into the air, and then quietly blew his brains out with his revolver. Both the American and Mexican armies witnessed this splendid effort.<sup>3</sup>

Although laudatory letters about army officers appeared in the American press from time to time during the war, this one was not typical of the correspondents' accounts. How it had reached the Delta was a mystery. And, as it turned out, the letter was a hoax — but like most hoaxes it had a base of plausibility. The issue of the letter's authenticity touched off a month-long dispute among the New Orleans papers.

One of the central figures in the printing of the letter was Alexander Walker, newly appointed editor of the Delta. Walker, outspokenly Democratic in his politics and often personal



in his printed attacks against New Orleans' other editors, gave several conflicting versions of how the letter had found its way into the pages of the Delta. At first he claimed he had purposely used it to hoax the other New Orleans editors.<sup>4</sup> Later he admitted that he had printed the letter "due to public anxiety" about the battles at Mexico City.<sup>5</sup>

The letter had reached the Delta early on the morning of September 8, 1847 in the same packet which contained Freaner's accounts of the victories at Churubusco and Contreras. McGinnis, handling the copy for the Delta's morning edition, had laid the strange item signed "Leonidas" aside for Walker's review.<sup>6</sup> Walker decided not to print it, but changed his mind because it contained some battle details not yet printed. He also admitted to making some insertions in the copy which magnified Pillow's role even beyond what already was claimed. Although it clearly was not written by Freaner, Walker said "we believed it was from Mr. Freaner who had never before misled or deceived us."<sup>8</sup> As a result it appeared in the Delta the day following the publication of Freaner's eyewitness accounts.

What made the letter a special issue of contention in New Orleans was a long fight the Delta and the Picayune had been having over Pillow's military abilities. The newspaper argument had started in April, 1847 after Polk had appointed his former partner as a major general. The Picayune said the promotion "was not indicated by the confidence of the army nor the display of any great military abilities." The paper repeated a story which

haunted Pillow throughout the war regarding his mislocation of defensive trenches at Camargo. "They were the laugh of the service," the Picayune stated.<sup>9</sup> After the battle of Cerro Gordo, which resulted in Kendall's praising Pillow, the Picayune attempted to be objective about the political general. It stated, "Pillow distinguished himself by his personal gallantry upon the occasion, being in the thickest of the fight....We have endeavored to give the facts as we believe them to have occurred and shall willingly modify this statement if it be in any degree erroneous."<sup>10</sup> A request for modification soon came in the form of a letter signed by 17 officers of the 2nd Tennessee Volunteer Regiment. It charged, "The truth is, the general was ignorant of the grounds and of the enemy's strength and preparations for defense."<sup>11</sup> The embarrassed Picayune renewed the attack, stating, "The sympathies of the people were excited on account of a wound which was reported to have nearly severed (Pillow's) sword arm in twain, whilst in fact he carried the ball that hurt him in his breeches pocket."<sup>12</sup> The Delta, Washington Union and other Democratic papers loyal to Polk's Administration, defended Pillow repeatedly against such charges.<sup>13</sup>

The appearance of the Leonidas Letter renewed the dispute in the New Orleans press. The Picayune immediately attributed the letter to Pillow's own hand. It explained, sarcastically,

It is eminently worthy of Gen. Pillow himself. We know not who the author may be, but to our minds it bears the indelible impress of Gen. Pillow's genius. We believe as sincerely as we believe anything where the evidence is not direct

and positive, that if not written by himself, it was written at his dictation or suggestion. We repeat that it is every way characteristic of his genius.<sup>14</sup>

The next day it followed with a more scathing comment:

Since writing (our first) article, we have more direct evidence on the subject which leaves no doubt whatever with us that the letter, if not wholly written by General Pillow, is to be regarded as his to all intents and purposes....We can but inadequately express our loathing of the spirit and purpose of the letter. It has been gratifying to us to know (our rebuke is) universally approved...The manifestation of public sentiment on the subject is too clear to be mistaken; it is one of stern reprobation on the whole scope and purpose of the letter...<sup>15</sup>

The Delta immediately countered there was no proof that Pillow was involved in the production of the letter.<sup>16</sup> A.M. Holbrook, co-editor of the Picayune, and William L. Hodge, editor of the Commercial Bulletin, rebutted that they had seen the proof — in the form of the original letter — with their own eyes.<sup>17</sup> It had been shown to them, they wrote, by a friend of Walker's, Joseph Grant. Further, they wrote, Walker reportedly had told a number of people that the original was indeed from Pillow, and was so wild in its praise of Pillow that Walker had had to edit some comments out of the published version.<sup>18</sup>

Grant admitted he had given copies of the original document to the Picayune and Bulletin, but had a different version of the events. In a letter printed by the Delta Grant explained he had been so interested in the Leonidas article that he had asked for and received Walker's permission to look at the original copy. While he was standing on the street in front of the Delta

office, reading the letter with a friend, Holbrook of the Picayune walked past. Grant said,

...when my friend remarked that we had the veritable Leonidas Letter, with the suppressed passages, which, at Holbrook's request, I commenced reading to him. Before I had finished doing so I was obliged, more than once, to reprimand him for the rudeness he manifested in attempting to snatch it out of my hand.<sup>19</sup>

When the attempt to grab the letter failed, Holbrook begged for a copy of it, Grant claimed. "Holbrook, this is ungentlemanly," Grant said he protested because the contents of the letter were "private." But Grant then admitted he had made no "promise of secrecy" when he had asked Walker's permission to see the original, so he finally offered to read it out loud to his friend, and Holbrook would be free to copy it down as he read if the editor wanted to. Holbrook did, and then left quickly, Grant said. Grant apparently lost his concern with the questions of secrecy about the letter, however, for he next went to the office of the Bulletin and wrote out a copy of it for Hodge. However, Grant said, the whole incident had been part of a hoax, and he, Holbrook and Hodge were all victims of it.<sup>20</sup>

Walker attempted to close the issue in a signed editorial, claiming the whole thing was a hoax. "The editors of the Picayune were attempting "to turn a broad farce into a serious comedy," Walker wrote. It was all "a very laughable hoax to which the Picayune editors fell easy victims," according to Walker. He also denied he had ever told the editors of the Bulletin and the Picayune that the Leonidas Letter was genuine.

The reason he had not exposed "the hoax" sooner, Walker explained, was that, "after the publication of the hoax I felt no desire to interrupt the very great enjoyment of the editors who were chuckling over their fun and sagacity at the corners of all our streets." He continued:

Such a hoax, would have been, in my opinion, a legitimate response to the impertinent intermeddling of these editors, and such as any gentleman would be apt to employ to persons who united, in such astonishing degree, the most remarkable gullibility, with the most impertinent spirit of curiosity.<sup>21</sup>

The editors of the Bulletin and Picayune, Walker concluded, were "a pair of editorial sap-heads."<sup>22</sup> In return, the Picayune called Walker's actions, "the most disgraceful transaction for the press of this city in many years. The scheme was conceived in iniquity and carried through by unscrupulous means and repeated falsehoods."<sup>23</sup> Hodge of the Bulletin was equally outraged by Walker's explanation. "Who might not be hoaxed by such a system of out and out lying?," he asked. The "miserable and contemptible piece of manufacture" had earned the Delta the community's "contempt," he asserted.<sup>24</sup>

Meanwhile, cut off from the outside world by the strong guerrilla forces to its rear, Scott's army in Mexico City remained ignorant of the month-long feud in the New Orleans papers over the authenticity of the Leonidas letter. On October 22 an explosion of sorts occurred, however, when the American Star reprinted the letter from the Picayune.<sup>25</sup> The North American soon

followed, and the appearance of the document in Mexico City touched off a bitter, five-month dispute among the army's top generals. The dispute, which had Presidential politics at its roots, pitted Scott, the Whig possibility, against two of his top division commanders, Generals Pillow and William J. Worth. It also involved the question of who should receive credit for the army's triumphs.<sup>26</sup>

Another root cause of the dispute was the question of letter writing to newspapers. After each of the war's major battles a large number of letters were written by officers to friends, relatives and editors at home describing the participation of the writer or his unit in detail. Local newspapers often reprinted excerpts of letters from local participants; many accounts were accurate, some were not, but almost all would include some political connotations.

The flood of letters from the army reached a climax in January, 1847 when a private letter from Zachary Taylor criticizing the President and the secretary of war made its way into the New York Evening Express. Taylor's letter, written to his friend General Edmund P. Gaines, recounted his personal frustrations of attempting to carry out the war without adequate men and supplies, and blamed the Administration for the problems. Although Taylor had not intended it for publication, Gaines passed it along to the editor of the Express, and the widely reprinted letter soon led to an extended political dispute. Rather than

helping Taylor, the publication hurt him; President Polk withholding further support from the potential presidential contender.<sup>27</sup>

Secretary of War William L. Marcy and the President also revived an order which had not been used for 24 years in an attempt to cut down on the letters from the army. The order, Number 650, stated:

650. Private letters or reports relative to military marches and operations are frequently mischievous in design, and always disgraceful to the army. They are therefore strictly forbidden; and any officer found guilty of making such reports for publication, without special permission, or of placing the writing beyond his control, so that it finds its way to the press within one month after the termination of the campaign to which it relates, shall be dismissed from the service.<sup>28</sup>

Enforcement of the regulation was left to local commanders, who ignored it for the most part. But Scott, not noted for good humor in such situations, was deeply bothered by the implication inherent in the Leonidas Letter that credit for the victories might not go to him. Reinforcing his belief was the publication of another letter, called the "Tampico (or Veritas) Letter," which gave Worth credit for discovering the route that allowed the Americans to outflank the Mexicans at Lake Chalco near Mexico City. Scott then issued his own version of Order No. 650, aimed at barring the letter writing practice:

GENERAL ORDERS - No. 349

Headquarters of the Army  
Mexico, Nov. 12, 1847

The attention of certain officers of this army is recalled to (Regulation No. 650) which the general-in-chief is resolved to enforce so far as it may be in his power.

As yet but two echoes from home of the brilliant operation of our arms in the basin have reached us; the first in a New Orleans, and the second through a Tampico newspaper.

It required not a little charity to believe that the principal heroes of those scandalous letters alluded to did not write them, or especially procure them to be written, and the intelligent can be at no loss in conjecturing the authors — chiefs, partisans and pet familiars. To the honor of the service, the disease — pruriency of fame, not earned — cannot have seized upon half a dozen officers (present), all of whom, it is believed, belong to the same two coteries.

False credit may, no doubt, be obtained at home, by such despicable self-puffings and malignant exclusion of others; but at the expense of the just esteem and consideration of all honorable officers who love their country, their profession and the truth of history. The indignation of the great number of the latter class cannot fail, in the end to bring down the conceited and the envious to their proper level.

By the command of Maj. Gen. Scott: -

H.L. SCOTT, A.A.A.G.<sup>29</sup>

It was an unusual general order, to say the least. The second letter to which Scott referred was the "Tampico Letter," so named because the version which reached Mexico City was from an American newspaper published in Tampico.<sup>30</sup> It had been reprinted from the Pittsburgh Post of September 25, 1847. Although quite different in tone from the Leonidas Letter, it praised Worth and Colonel James Duncan for their roles in leading the army around Lake Chalco, mildly leaving an impression Scott had taken the wrong road.<sup>31</sup> It was strong enough, however, to increase Scott's unhappiness with his officers. He quickly relieved



Pillow, Worth and Duncan of their duties, and ordered a court of inquiry into their actions.<sup>32</sup>

Another party in Mexico City unhappy with the letter was Freaner. Totally unprepared, he had received a copy of the Delta with the Leonidas Letter, and a critical letter from his editor, Walker, expressing "dissatisfaction and disgust" that the letter had been included in Freaner's mail packet. Freaner, of course, reacted indignantly. He immediately went to his friend Trist, and "denounced in strong terms" the attempt to involve him in the matter. "A deception had been perpetrated in his name," he told the State Department representative.<sup>33</sup>

It also turned out Freaner held the trump cards in the whole matter. There were two, not one, original versions of the Leonidas Letter, and while proving he had not been involved in the hoax Freaner was able to produce both of them. When the September 10 issue of the Delta with the Leonidas Letter arrived at Mexico City, the "indignant" Freaner vaguely recalled having seen the letter before. When he went to Trist, he asked for some old papers which the diplomat had been storing for him. Searching the papers Freaner found the similar letter. It had been given to him by General Pillow, Freaner told Trist, handing it over to the diplomat. Trist, realizing the political importance of the letter, passed it along to Scott. It was then that the commanding general relieved Pillow, and the court of inquiry followed.

A delay of several months ensued while Trist concluded the peace treaty and Freaner delivered it to Washington. The

court finally convened on March 15, and Freaner was a key witness. He gave his account of the incident to the court: Several days after Contreras and Churubusco, August 23, 1847, the correspondent was trying to compile a list of killed and wounded, when a message came inviting him to Pillow's headquarters. Arriving there, Freaner was greeted by Pillow and General Franklin Pierce. Pillow introduced him to Pierce, Freaner said, as "our friend," and Pillow then told Pierce he was "going to make the Delta" with its coverage of this battle. Freaner replied no one person could make a newspaper's reputation. Unperturbed, Pillow invited Freaner to have a drink, and ordered an aide to prepare a casualty list for the reporter. Pierce, in the meantime, left. Pillow also offered the correspondent, dinner, a bed for the night, and a place to keep his horse. It was all a great temptation, Freaner admitted, because of the day's rain. It was at this point Pillow produced the Leonidas document, Freaner related. The reporter glanced at it, then told Pillow he was only sending off a general summary of the battles at that time and would send a more detailed report later. Pillow replied, Freaner said, that he had prepared the letter for the reporter and was "anxious" that it go off with "the first impressions." Freaner told the court he again looked at the document and saw many statements in it he did not agree with. However, without making a commitment to use it, he offered to take the letter with him, and Pillow turned it over. After returning to his quarters, Freaner said he put the letter aside

and did not search for it again until receiving a copy of the Delta with the Leonidas document in it. He then looked up the original handed to him by Pillow, and found "they were twin brothers."<sup>34</sup>

When the Delta came with the letter in it, Freaner continued, he was summoned again to Pillow's headquarters, where the general asked him if he still had the original letter. Freaner said he did, and Pillow asked him to return it. He reminded the correspondent that the editors of the Delta had told Pillow "that (Freaner) was a man who could be relied on and that he should deem it a violation of friendship" if Freaner didn't return it. Freaner said he would contact Pillow later regarding it, and that night wrote a letter to the general stating that he had decided to keep the original.<sup>35</sup> Freaner also sent off a letter that night asking the Delta's editors to save the original published copy for him as well.<sup>36</sup>

Freaner's testimony was among the strongest against Pillow during the inquiry, according to John Peoples.<sup>37</sup> But the Crescent's correspondent also presented a strong statement against the general. Pillow had approached Peoples regarding the republication of the Leonidas Letter at Mexico City. Peoples had wondered why Pillow often "had attempted to cement" a friendship between them. Nevertheless, he did consider the general a friend and was not surprised when he received a summons to go to Pillow's headquarters one night in October. He was surprised at the purpose of the call, however. "He solicited, aye, even sought to

purchase our aid in giving credence to the romancing" of the Leonidas Letter, Peoples later wrote.<sup>38</sup> Pillow told him, Peoples testified, that "I never forget my friends or forgive my enemies." Pillow requested that when Peoples reprinted the Leonidas Letter "that you do me justice." As Peoples went to leave, he said Pillow "reminded me that he was second in command and that if General Scott should go home or anything happen to him, he (General Pillow) would command the army."<sup>39</sup> Peoples refused the request, however, and when he "treated the production in the manner it merited," in the Star he was not disappointed it "severed the bond of friendship" between him and Pillow.<sup>40</sup>

Scott was particularly upset by Pillow's attempts to influence Peoples, since the latter edited the semi-official army paper. Scott told the court of inquiry, "Pillow (was) thereby seeking and endeavoring corruptly to excite a sordid and base interest in ...Peoples, through the hopes and fears of the latter, by a prostituted use of high rank, its powers and influences."<sup>41</sup>

Because of his testimony regarding Pillow, Freaner was criticized in a number of Democratic newspapers. Freaner did not appear too disturbed by the criticism, but after reading some remarks in the Vicksburg Sentinel he wrote: "Let them call me anything that suits their vivid imaginations, unless they say whig — if they call me a whig 'give them jessie,' for that's what I won't stand...." As for his relationship with Pillow, Freaner said, realistically, "General Pillow has not forgotten the value of the

press, nor the press the value of General Pillow."<sup>42</sup> Showing its irritation with the newspaper attacks on Freaner, the Delta stated: "The difference between Mr. Freaner and many other of our heroes, is, that he has received nothing for his services, whilst they have been well paid in money, as well as in public consideration and popular applause."<sup>43</sup> "Whatever proceeds from James L. Freaner," the Delta said regarding the investigation, "will be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth." It added, "The issue of veracity being raised between General Pillow and Mr. Freaner, the latter very properly and prudently declined giving to the former the evidence" which served as his defense.<sup>44</sup>

The hearings dragged on for weeks, Scott and Pillow calling a large number of witnesses, and countering each other's claims. There never was a clear explanation of how the Leonidas Letter got into Freaner's mail parcel the night in question. The Delta, perplexed, said it must have been "hocus pocus."<sup>45</sup> Finally, in yet another twist in the story, a little known paymaster on Pillow's staff, Major Archibald W. Burns, came forward and told the court that he had secretly gone into Pillow's office, copied a number of notes that he found on a table, composed the Leonidas Letter from them, and managed to get it into Freaner's mail bag in the guise of a private letter.<sup>46</sup> In another contradiction, Burns and the Delta's editor Walker each insisted on having made the same additions to the Leonidas manuscript. On

the question of the insertions, Walker later explained, "(They) were made by the editor of this paper in exercise of the prerogative which all editors claim and exercise" to improve correspondence.<sup>47</sup> After Walker had testified to the court, Peoples reported to the Crescent from Mexico City: "The Army people don't understand Walker of the Delta admitting to putting in the interlineations, as in his interlineation of hoaxes he put down one event which (Pillow) introduced evidence to prove did take place — and right lustily did his witnesses swear to it too."<sup>48</sup> The various parties stuck by their conflicting statements, and the court, although it returned to the States for more testimony, and dragged on into the Summer of 1848, finally acquitted Pillow of the charges.<sup>49</sup>

There was intense public interest in New Orleans regarding the trial, and the papers even occasionally issued extras when additional batches of the testimony arrived from Mexico City.<sup>50</sup> The three major papers had reporters in court every day. The volume of testimony presented a challenge for the reporters. The Delta said it had to use two reporters to keep up with the transcripts. The Crescent reported that it and the Delta were getting the same report because their reporters "found it almost impossible separately to keep up with the proceedings...so they agreed to make a joint report."<sup>51</sup> The Picayune hired James M. Jewell, who had worked occasionally as a Mexico correspondent for the paper, to make its word-by-word accounts of the proceedings. Jewell also found it impossible for one person to keep up with

the testimony, and made an arrangement with Tobey of the North American to work jointly.<sup>52</sup> On some days the detailed court accounts filled as many as nine columns of space in the New Orleans papers.<sup>53</sup>

The problem of uncertain mail deliveries continued to plague the papers, too, and for the first time in the war the Picayune found itself in the position of having to occasionally reprint the transcripts out of the Delta and Crescent.<sup>54</sup> The Picayune's trial coverage had gone astray, Scully reported from Mexico City, for the same reason much of the correspondence had been lost in the past. "They were sent by express, the rider of which was robbed of his horse," he wrote. The man managed to make his way back to the Mexican capital with the Picayune's transcriptions, but in the meantime the other New Orleans papers had gotten their coverage through to Vera Cruz successfully. Scully expressed "regret" over the failure to be first with the news, concluding, "this was altogether unavoidable."<sup>55</sup>

Peoples was an intense observer of the court's hearings throughout. "The proceedings in this court of Inquiry are singular indeed to one who watches it closely," he wrote to the Crescent. "It is all rich, rich, rich; and it will all tend to give the 'Modern Gideon' a notoriety which he doubtless thinks a man had better have than to have nothing at all."<sup>56</sup> pillow's only purpose, the reporter said, was "to create an impression at home." He called Burns' account of the battle "romancing."

Pillow, Peoples stated, "as it seems to me, without the least hope of benefiting his cause, so shapes his questions as to irritate witnesses, and to impune the good motives through which they act." The reporter hoped "the people at home" would not be deceived by Pillow's performance.<sup>57</sup> Closely observing the personalities in the courtroom, Peoples wrote,

Scott feels deeply mortified at the course things have taken and he does not look like the same man....It is beyond doubt the President has treated the General badly....Under the circumstances can you wonder Scott feels chagrined? Can you wonder that the proud spirit which bore him from victory to victory...has been partially broken?...I confess that my heart bled when I saw Winfield Scott standing before the court, a criminal (to use his own language). I could scarcely realize the fact. To see him there amongst those he had accused 'scrambling for justice,' impressed me with a feeling I cannot portray.<sup>58</sup>

Although the reporters were allowed a free hand to report these proceedings, there is some evidence this was not the army's general policy regarding such hearings. A mild sensation was caused in early April in the Mexican capital when two American army officers were caught with five other Americans attempting to rob a local hotel. A Mexican employee was killed in the incident, and one of the American officers wounded. The New Orleans correspondents filed long reports about the robbery and the followup trial.<sup>59</sup>

Scully of the Picayune reported there had been an attempt to have the press keep the names of the officers out of the papers until the trial was over. The press, however, did not



agree. Noting the outstanding combat record of one of the accused officers, Scully explained his own position: "If he be guilty...neither his bravery nor position should shield him."<sup>60</sup> When the case came to trial in mid-April Scully reported to the Picayune that the court had placed a temporary "gag order" on the proceedings. "I would send you a report of the evidence," the reporter explained, "but the court has only admitted reporters on the condition that the evidence shall not be published here or in the United States until such time shall have elapsed that there will be a certainty of the publication not reaching here until the trial is concluded."<sup>61</sup>

While Pillow, Worth, Duncan and other top officers eventually escaped censure for their alleged letters to newspapers, at least one other officer — Captain Samuel H. Montgomery of the Quartermaster Corps — did not. He was charged with having written a letter to the Pennsylvania Argus which criticized Scott for the armistice of August 21 and the Pennsylvania 2nd Volunteer Regiment as "having the reputation of being the worst officered in the service." At a court martial in February, 1848, Montgomery was found "not guilty" of the charge relating to Scott, but the second was upheld, and on the basis of "conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman," he was dismissed from service.<sup>62</sup> In another case, involving a member of the U.S. Marine Corps, a court martial was convened at Brooklyn, New York, several years after the war (September, 1852), for the trial of First Lieutenant John S. Devlin, who was charged with writing an article for the

Brooklyn Daily Eagle derogatory of the Corps' performance in Mexico. During the trial a New York attorney, John Lomas, testified he had written the article, and the charges were dropped.<sup>63</sup>

The Leonidas Hoax was one of the darker chapters of the war for the press and the military. Pillow's attempts to influence the reporters with offers of aid and favors foreshadowed a practice which became more widespread during the American Civil War.<sup>64</sup> This study has found little evidence that many officers attempted this practice during the Mexican War. And, to their credit, Frenner and Peoples resisted Pillow's overtures. The actions of the Delta's editor, Alexander Walker, are perhaps not excusable, but they are understandable given the intense political partianship of much of the press of the day. Whatever Pillow's exact role in the matter, and it was never conclusively proven that he had written the letter, he suffered much more than he gained. His attempt to secure recognition for his role in Mexico failed, and he dropped into political obscurity.<sup>65</sup> As for the press, again faced with a complex story and the necessity to communicate it home under trying conditions, the reporters responded successfully to the challenge and provided the nation with first-hand accounts of the trial, its personalities and its consequences.

## NOTES

1. New Orleans Delta, April 7, May 10, 1848.
2. Edward S. Wallace, General William Jenkins Worth, Monterey's Forgotten Hero (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1953) p. 173.
3. Ibid. This particular passage, it was later learned, was added to the original letter by the Delta's editor.
4. New Orleans Delta, September 24, 1847.
5. Ibid., May 10, 1848.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid. Also see April 7, 1848.
8. Ibid.
9. New Orleans Picayune, April 23, 1847. The trenches would have provided more protection for attackers, rather than the American defenders, the story claimed.
10. Ibid., May 2, 1847.
11. Ibid., May 29, 1847.
12. Ibid.
13. For examples see Washington Union, October 21, 1847; New Orleans Delta, September 24, 1847.
14. New Orleans Picayune, September 11, 1847.
15. Ibid., September 12, 1847.
16. New Orleans Delta, September 24, 1847.
17. New Orleans Picayune, September 19, 1847.
18. Ibid.
19. New Orleans Delta, September 24, 1847.
20. Ibid. Also see New Orleans Picayune, September 24, 1847.
21. New Orleans Delta, September 22, 1847.

22. Ibid.
23. New Orleans Picayune, September 24, 1847.
24. New Orleans Commercial Bulletin, September 18, 1847, quoted in New Orleans Picayune, September 19, 1847.
25. Wallace, op. cit., p. 172.
26. Ibid., Chap. 15; Charles Winslow Elliott, Winfield Scott, The Soldier and the Man (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1937) Chap. 41.
27. Smith, op. cit., I: 347, 507.
28. Augusta (Georgia) Chronicle and Sentinel, February 10, 1847. The order had first appeared in the General Regulations of the Army in 1825, but had been excluded when the regulations were reprinted in 1841.
29. Printed in the New Orleans Picayune, December 18, 1847.
30. Most likely the Tampico Sentinel, although it is not identified in contemporary sources.
31. Wallace, op. cit., pp. 174-5.
32. It was a complicated affair, lasting from November, 1847 until July, 1848. Soon after he brought the charges, Scott's temper cooled, and he offered to drop the whole affair. Worth and Duncan accepted, but Pillow demanded his own court proceedings continue. The court held hearings in Mexico City for more than a month, and then travelled to the States for sessions at New Orleans, Louisville, Kentucky, and Fredricksburg, Maryland. In the end the court, which had been appointed by the President, recommended no action be taken against Pillow. See 30th Congress, 1st Session [Senate] Executive No. 65 (August 3, 1848.) "Message from the President of the United States, Communicating, In Compliance with Resolution of the Senate, the Proceedings of the Two Courts of Inquiry in the case of Major General Pillow." Also see Wallace, op. cit., Chap. 15; Elliott, op. cit., Chap. 41; and Smith, op. cit., II: 184-188.
33. New Orleans Delta, April 7, 1848.
34. "Message of the President....", op. cit., pp. 13-15.
35. Ibid.
36. New Orleans Delta, May 10, 1848.

37. New Orleans Crescent, March 30, 1848.
38. Mexico City American Star, May 30, 1848, republished in New Orleans Crescent, June 16, 1848.
39. "Message of the President....", op. cit., p. 117.
40. Mexico City American Star, May 30, 1848.
41. New Orleans Picayune, March 31, 1848.
42. New Orleans Delta, May 23, 1848.
43. Ibid., April 7, 1848.
44. Ibid.
45. New Orleans Delta, April 7, 1848.
46. Elliott, op. cit., p. 573; Smith, op. cit., II: 436-7.
47. New Orleans Delta, April 11, 1848.
48. New Orleans Crescent, May 22, 1848.
49. Smith, op. cit., II: 437.
50. New Orleans Delta, April 10, 1848. There is not as much evidence, however, that the trial had much interest for newspapers elsewhere. See for example Charleston Courier, April 14, 1848.
51. New Orleans Crescent, April 24, 1848.
52. New Orleans Picayune, May 9, 1848.
53. Ibid., April 22,23, 1848.
54. Ibid., March 31, 1848.
55. Ibid., May 4, 1848.
56. New Orleans Crescent, May 4, 1848.
57. Ibid., April 14, 1848.
58. Ibid., March 30, 1848. Freaner also wrote with strong feeling regarding Scott's court room appearance.

59. See New Orleans Picayune, April 23, May 4, 1848. The Pillow court did, however, require all the reporters to "furnish their names and evidences of responsibility," Washington Union, April 7, 1848.

60. Ibid., April 23, 1848.

61. Ibid., May 4, 1848.

62. New Orleans Crescent, March 21, 1848. The offending letter appeared in the Argus on October 15, 1847. The part relating to Scott read: "After the battles of the 19th and 20th ult., when we opened up the way into the city, Gen. Scott, much against the wishes of the whole army, granted an armistice (at the solicitation of Santa Anna) on the 21st, which is still in existence, and has given time to the Mexicans to reinforce themselves, and we have now to do the work over again, at the loss of more of our brave men." The charge against Montgomery was that this statement violated Polk's order of January 28, 1847, No. 650, regarding military letter writing.

63. Connor and Faulk, op. cit., p. 247.

64. See J. Cutler Andrews, The North Reports the Civil War, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1955) for a study of this problem.

65. Pillow's later career is discussed in Dictionary of American Biography (21 vols., New York: Scribner, 1943) Vol. 14: 603-4. Perhaps the most telling point regarding Pillow is that, although almost every other leading general in the war has had a biography written about him, Pillow has not.

## CHAPTER 20

### WITHDRAWAL PAINS AT MEXICO CITY

With the peace treaty delivered and the court of inquiry concluded, events in Mexico quickly passed from public interest. Revolutions in Europe had become the No. 1 story in many American papers. In mid-April, 1848, the Picayune observed, "The astounding events passing in Europe have so completely monopolized that faculty of the public minds that rejoices in news, and doats upon wonders, that the staple excitements of journalism have lost their savor." The paper noted there was great public interest throughout the country in the French Revolution in particular. "Everybody, every place, everything is full of it," the paper wrote.<sup>1</sup>

Only one formal step remained for the war to come to an end: the ratification by the Mexican Congress of the treaty as revised by the U.S. Senate. For the time being the American reporters in Mexico City were caught in limbo, waiting to see if it would be peace or renewed war. However, they continued a steady flow of letters to their publications — Frenner to the Delta; Peoples, once again using his familiar pseudonym "Chaparral" for a new New Orleans daily, the Crescent; and Charles Callahan and D. Scully to the Picayune. And, as before, they

remained the main communication link between the government and people in the States, and affairs in Mexico.

When Kendall departed for New Orleans in October, 1847 he made arrangements to have the former Picayune printer, Callahan, provide the paper's coverage from the Mexican capital. Callahan worked for the Picayune in two separate periods between October, 1847 and the occupation's conclusion in June, 1848. He was the paper's primary correspondent at Mexico City from October, 1847 until he joined Tobey in running the North American the following January. After that paper closed, he rejoined the Picayune as a back-up correspondent for Scully.<sup>2</sup>

Much younger than Kendall and not as well connected with the army leaders as the Picayune's editor had been, Callahan wrote letters which were less analytical and more general in tone. During October, November and December, 1847 he reported on a large number of clashes between the American troops and the civilian population in the streets of the Mexican capital. Most of these incidents involved only small numbers of people, and often were robbery attempts or quarrels over gambling incidents.<sup>3</sup> On November 3 the correspondent witnessed a charge by a detachment of American dragoons to break up a stone-throwing mob, which had gathered to protest the whipping of a Mexican accused of attempting to kill an American. After the crowd was dispersed, Callahan wrote, "The greaser was whipped and taken back to the guard house."<sup>4</sup> A week later he watched approvingly as three



American regiments paraded in the city streets. "It displayed to the eyes of the astonished Mexicans the high state of discipline to which our troops have arrived," he commented.<sup>5</sup>

Callahan also had an eye for the brighter side of life in the occupied city. He attended the opera and was amazed at its quality, writing exuberantly, "I do not believe (it) has ever been equalled on this continent." He added, "It would open the eyes of a New Orleans audience — but I think the expense of getting it up would rather frighten a New Orleans manager."<sup>6</sup> On a Sunday in November he went riding through the city streets "and was agreeably surprised to see a large number of ladies present." Almost every carriage contained "two or three lovely senoritas," he estimated, concluding, "The fair damsels are fast losing their fear of the 'barbarians of the North.'" As a result, Callahan said, "About one-half of our army was also there."<sup>7</sup>

Callahan's attitude towards the Mexicans was similar to the other American reporters. Attending a meeting in Mexico City in January, 1848 at which a number of army officers urged a railroad be built between Vera Cruz and the Mexican capital, Callahan wrote, "It remains for the strong-minded and enterprising descendants of the Anglo-Saxons to confer upon this benighted people the benefits of civilization; first of which is the proposed railroad."<sup>8</sup> He often revealed his strong bias against the Mexicans and their culture. "The Mexicans are certainly the coolest thieves in the world," he commented in one letter.<sup>9</sup> In another he claimed, "I have never been in a church in Mexico

without having my pocket picked."<sup>10</sup>

Although he wrote regular and voluminous letters to the Picayune, Callahan appears to have been more interested in working as a printer, and when the opportunity to join Tobey as at the North American came along he quickly accepted. The Picayune wished him well with the opportunity, adding that his letters had been "copied extensively throughout the United States."<sup>11</sup>

It was at this point that another important reporter came on the scene — D. Scully of the Picayune.<sup>12</sup> During the final six months of the American occupation the Picayune relied on the outspoken and strongly analytical writing of Scully for its primary coverage of events in Mexico. Following the tradition of the Picayune's Kendall and Haile, Scully refused to be tied to the garrison cities, and took to the field with American units whenever opportunity allowed. In January, 1848 he accompanied General Joseph Lane on a three-week mission which almost succeeded in capturing Santa Anna, and in May, 1848 he was the only American reporter to witness the exchange of the final peace agreement at Queretaro.<sup>13</sup>

Scully was another former New Orleans printer who had followed the armies to Mexico. His opportunity to report regularly came in January when Callahan decided to devote his full energy to his own paper in Mexico City. The Picayune made arrangements to receive letters from Scully and gave him the title

of "special correspondent."<sup>14</sup>

Scully's writing style was graphic, and strongly pro-American in the vein of the other American correspondents. The Picayune observed he wrote in a "bold and independent tone."<sup>15</sup> The paper also had occasional problems handling all of the material he sent from the Mexican capital, once noting: "His narrative is intensely interesting, but is so long we cannot possibly find room for it this morning."<sup>16</sup> When this occurred the paper followed the pattern it had established earlier with Kendall and Haile, and ran the letters over a period of several days.<sup>17</sup> On occasion the Picayune also disagreed publicly with Scully's observations about events in Mexico; but it allowed him free rein with his opinions. When the correspondent called for the United States to retain all of Mexico and turn it into new states for the Union, the Picayune declared: "We would rather agree with our correspondent in his conclusion, if we could — at all events we are glad there are others who hope better things (than we)..."<sup>18</sup>

Scully, like most of the American reporters, was quite critical of the activities of the Catholic church. On one occasion he wrote:

Bishop, curate, monk or friar seems to be devoid of all sympathy with their race, and have only one object in view — to increase the wealth of, or aggrandize the church at large, or their own particular order. It is not upon the rich or the middle class alone they prey; but (the poor too)....the whole country is filled with medicant (sic) orders, who are always found

begging, and who do nothing else, unless it is to pray, which, in charity, we may believe they do sometimes.<sup>19</sup>

Scully believed the United States should keep all of Mexico. In mid-January, 1848 he wrote to the Picayune:

I can see no other course to pursue but to retain the country we have conquered, and at once enact laws for its government, which will ultimately fit it for becoming a part of the Union, upon a footing of equality with the present States.<sup>20</sup>

Anticipating the arguments against annexing all of Mexico, Scully continued,

I do not consider this so difficult a task as many think it. The great objections are their difference of language, religion and manners from our own; but looking at the rapidity with which Louisiana and Florida have become homogeneous and valuable members of the federation, such objections lack strength. Why cannot a portion of Mexico, after a lapse of a reasonable time, become equally valuable?<sup>21</sup>

The Picayune correspondent concluded this appeal for annexing all of Mexico with a good example of Manifest Destiny thinking:

Never was there a more erroneous idea than the country is not worthy of our efforts to elevate it. Leaving aside that is immense mineral resources, the soil and climate combined...are equal to any I have ever seen or experienced... Our commerce and manufactures would be vastly benefitted by (keeping Mexico). The introduction of our liberal system of commerce and just laws, and the immigration of our people and enlightened Europeans, would stimulate commerce and teach the inhabitants new wants which we, as the cheapest manufacturers of...fabrics, would be called upon to supply.<sup>22</sup>

When Scully opposed the terms of Trist's peace treaty with the Mexicans, the paper disagreed with him, but explained,

"Agreeably to our custom, we allow him full scope for the expression of his views — adopted not hastily nor without deep consideration."<sup>23</sup> Generally the paper had strong praise for Scully's work. When it heard he was accompanying the Lane expedition the Picayune said, "He is quite sure to be where spirited adventure is in foot and to render a faithful report thereof."<sup>24</sup> When his day-to-day account of Lane's attempts to capture Santa Anna arrived in February, 1848, the paper observed it had had "nothing more graphic" since Kendall's reports on the fall of Mexico City.<sup>25</sup> When Lane included Scully's participation in his official report about the mission to the War Department the Picayune expressed pride that "Mr. Scully is honorably mentioned."<sup>26</sup>

Scully's main opportunity to report from the field came in mid-January, 1848 when he accompanied seven companies of Dragoons and Texas Rangers, about 350 men, on a 22-day campaign against guerrilla units. It was one of the last major actions for the American forces in Mexico, and had an additional "secret" mission of attempting to capture Santa Anna, who was still at large. Commanded by General Joseph Lane, the Americans narrowly missed the former Mexican commander-in-chief, but managed to occupy a number of towns for the first time, captured public property, recovered stolen merchandise and freed American prisoners.<sup>27</sup>

During the 22-day march which involved covering almost

500 miles, Scully filed eight long reports to the Picayune: from Puebla (January 17), Tehauacan (January 23), Orizaba (January 25, 26, 29, 30), San Augustin del Palma (February 2) and, finally, Mexico City (February 10).<sup>28</sup> To assure these reports reached the paper as soon as possible he hired special messengers to carry them to Vera Cruz, and although the normal communication problems delayed them about three weeks, the paper praised Scully's resourcefulness and gave the letters extensive space.<sup>29</sup>

Like many of the correspondents before him, Scully wrote in excited tones about his experiences in the field. On the first day, following a march of 30 miles, he fell asleep at 4 a.m. "after a fatiguing march...under a hot sun and over a road covered with dust." The troops often moved long distances on short notice, and Scully closed one letter with, "After a march of thirty miles, and climbing two mountains, I feel inclined to rest, and shall bid you adieu for the present."<sup>30</sup> When the troops spent a night at Jalapa, a key link in the army's communication line to Vera Cruz and the sea, Scully wrote, "The vicinity of the city is infested with robbers and depredations upon travellers are constantly committed." He also charged foreign residents of some cities encouraged the Mexicans to attack the Americans, and then acted as agents for the stolen goods.<sup>31</sup>

On January 21, after the units had broken camp in a heavy rain before daylight, Lane passed the word Santa Anna was reported nearby. Strict secrecy about this mission had been

maintained, Scully wrote, "in the full hope the wily Mexican would soon be within our grasp." The hope was not fulfilled. "The command did not travel with the celerity the general designed," Scully reported from Tehuacan. Additionally, Santa Anna apparently was warned by scouts, Scully noting "we had the mortification to learn the great object of our search had fled two hours before we arrived."<sup>32</sup> The correspondent amused himself together with the rest of the troops by poking through Santa Anna's captured possessions. These included "his best military wardrobe, two of his costly canes, his field glasses, an elegant writing desk and three trunks of his lady's clothing." The American officers split up the captured goods, Scully reported, assuring the Picayune, "His military property was taken as legitimate spoils."<sup>33</sup>

Lane's forces seldom caught up with the elusive guerrillas, so Scully occupied most of his time writing about the countryside, describing various towns they occupied, (always adding that the local inhabitants wanted the Americans to occupy them permanently) and speculating whether various areas could support American "manufactures."<sup>34</sup>

A small clash with some regular Mexican troops finally occurred on the next to last day of the expedition. Scully, accompanying a Dragoon unit headed by Major William H. Polk, the President's brother, was personally involved in the action. It ended after a brief exchange of shots, Scully reporting 18

Mexicans were killed, three captured and one American injured. The correspondent's letters made no mention of his involvement, but General Lane cited him in the official reports to the War Department.<sup>35</sup> The units returned to Mexico City on February 8. Although it was clear they had failed to capture Santa Anna, Scully concluded the expedition had proven that "the country may be considered conquered from one extremity to the other."<sup>36</sup>

Scully's trip with Lane's troops was the last incident of combat reporting for the American reporters. For the most part they were suffering the pains of deep boredom. John Peoples, writing to the New Orleans Crescent, observed the Americans in Mexico City "were rusting away" with boredom.<sup>37</sup> The lack of action in Mexico City clearly irritated Scully. On March 9 he wrote: "This is the dullest place imaginable and will continue so during the armistice."<sup>38</sup> Another expression of the loneliness of the reporters came from Frenner when he wrote, "To you, all my old sweethearts, married and unmarried, or want to be married, or do not want to be married, Mustang wishes (you) all a merry and happy May Day."<sup>39</sup>

In addition to their reporting, editing or printing duties, there were some social outlets for the reporters. Opposite the city post office was an exchange reading room, similar to those in American cities, which included volumes in English, German, Spanish and French. Social activities for the reporters centered on the numerous saloons, cantinas and coffee houses, or



private clubs, such as the Aztec Club, which catered to high ranking officers.<sup>40</sup> And there was gambling, though the reporters frowned on it. Charles Callahan observed, "Probably in no place in the civilized world has the vice of gambling been carried to a greater extent than in this city within the last three months."<sup>41</sup> His Picayune colleague Scully wrote, "Gamblers are a species of scoundrels with which this city is infested." He was particularly concerned with the number of American and Mexican soldiers who were "being corrupted" by the gamblers' activity.<sup>42</sup>

Another of the amusements for the garrison at Mexico City was horse racing. Races were held in March, April and May, 1848. Peoples, writing to the Crescent, reported, "All of the (Mexico City) editors and the...correspondents from New Orleans have been presented with (passes) by the club."<sup>43</sup> Peoples explained he was so busy covering the Pillow Court of Inquiry he could not take advantage of his pass.<sup>44</sup> However, he, Freaner and Callahan supplied detailed accounts of the race results at the Mexico City track.<sup>45</sup>

Scully was particularly upset with social conditions in the occupied city. He noted poverty was so widespread that "Indians carry ice down from Popcatapetl on their back for a half dollar to a dollar." These trips, which involved two or three days work, were made to provide ice for the drinks of the Americans, he wrote.<sup>46</sup> When walking in the streets of the city, Scully observed, "one is beset with the lame, the blind and the deformed in every possible manner (all begging)....A great number

of them are soldiers who were wounded in the (war's) battles, and I have observed they never ask a Mexican for charity, but prefer begging from Americans." In addition to the former soldiers, a great number of children were involved as "professional beggars," Scully said.<sup>47</sup>

Freaner, after his roles in delivering the treaty and the Pillow inquiry ended, returned to writing letters almost daily to the Delta. On one occasion he ran into his old friend Capt. C.M. Haile, the Picayune's former correspondent. Freaner wrote:

They say the Captain doesn't speak to common folks now-a-days, such as correspondents, reporters and editors of newspapers, but I am inclined to think this is a mistake — for, although the straps sit very well upon his shoulders and he looks as well as captains generally do, there is a sort of unnatural appearance about him, which I do not think can be corrected until they take the soldiers clothes off him and put a quill in his hands.<sup>48</sup>

Additionally, Freaner said, "There is a leer in his eye that was not put there for soldiering — that knowing look was not planted in his phiz to stare a colonel in the face, and that playing, laughing mouth was not made for the purpose of bellowing out to a company of raw recruits."<sup>49</sup>

Freaner gave this glimpse at his living conditions in the Mexican city:

This evening we had a thundering storm...which commenced with most unreasonable-sized hail stones, which made all the dogs, greasers and white-folks take to their dens in double quick-time. I just saved myself from the peltings without any time

to spare, and coiled upon my bed in comparative comfort with a weekly Delta...when spang, spang, crash went the whole side of my room, which is entirely glass....'This moved my boots' a little, I assure you....<sup>50</sup>

Later the same night Frenner heard shots in the street below and went to investigate. Showing again his prejudice toward the Mexicans, he wrote, "I was not paid for my trouble in going downstairs, as there was nothing going on except a greaser killed by some unknown hand."<sup>51</sup>

As peace drew near the Americans started to notice changes in the city. Early in April Peoples noted, "The greasers are getting particularly saucy since the armistice, and chuckle whenever they think that the man they feared so much (Scott) has been suspended from the command."<sup>52</sup> In addition to the problems with the city residents, the Crescent's correspondent noted the army's morale and discipline were slipping. "Robbery seems to be the order of the day just now," he commented, reporting on several armed holdups committed by military personnel. Peoples wrote,

I can trace this bad conduct on the part of some belonging to the army to nothing but the insatiable appetite for gaming that exists in this city. Men lose their money, then their credit, and self-respect. Some of them will stoop to most anything.<sup>53</sup>

After the generals and the Pillow Court members had departed, a more pressing subject started to occupy the attention of the American community. "When I got up this morning," Peoples wrote on April 25, "I found the peace market flourishing, and the stock about as high as it has been yet." Even the Mexican press

"had changed its tune" and expected the Congress to soon settle the issue, he observed.<sup>54</sup> The outcome of the treaty deliberations remained in doubt to the end. "The result heaven only know," predicted Peoples, adding, "and you must not forget my advice to be prepared to chronicle either peace or war."<sup>55</sup>

For the reporters the interim of boredom and inactivity in Spring, 1848 was fast drawing to a close. During it they had occupied their time with letters to their respective papers, and, in a sense, killing time. For Americans at home, including the administration in Washington, events elsewhere were becoming more important. There remained now only one more story to file.

## NOTES

1. New Orleans Picayune, April 21, 1848.
2. Ibid., March 24, 1848.
3. See Ibid., December 19, 1847, for examples.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., January 20, 1848.
9. Ibid., July 28, 1848.
10. Ibid., December 23, 1847.
11. Ibid., March 24, 1848.
12. An extensive search of the Picayune and government documents has failed to uncover Scully's full first name.
13. Smith, op. cit., II: 427; New Orleans Picayune, June 8, 1848.
14. Ibid., February 13, 1848.
15. Ibid., March 10, 1848.
16. Ibid., February 13, 1848.
17. For examples see Picayune, February 15, 18, 1848.
18. Ibid., January 30, 1848.
19. Ibid., March 24, 1848. Also see Picayune, January 30, 1848.
20. Ibid., January 30, 1848.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid., March 10, 1848.
24. Ibid., February 20, 1848.

25. Ibid., February 15, 1848.
26. Ibid., April 16, 1848.
27. Smith, op. cit., II: 427.
28. New Orleans Picayune, February 15, 18, March 9, 1848.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid., March 9, 1848.
31. Ibid., February 15, 1848.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid. April 16, 1848.
36. Ibid., March 9, 1848.
37. New Orleans Crescent, April 22, 1848.
38. New Orleans Picayune, March 24, 1848.
39. New Orleans Delta, May 19, 1848.
40. Wallace, "American Occupation of Mexico City," op. cit., p. 163.
41. New Orleans Picayune, January 30, 1848.
42. Ibid., April 23, 1848.
43. New Orleans Crescent, April 13, 1848.
44. Ibid., April 14, 1848.
45. Ibid., May 19, 1848; New Orleans Delta, May 19, 1848.
46. New Orleans Picayune, March 24, 1848.
47. Ibid.
48. New Orleans Delta, December 23, 1847.
49. Ibid.

50. Ibid., June 4, 1848.
51. Ibid.
52. New Orleans Crescent, April 22, 1848.
53. Ibid.
54. Ibid., May 8, 1848.
55. Ibid., May 27, 1848.

## CHAPTER 21

### THE LAST STORY

When the U.S. Senate approved the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in March, 1848 it made some minor changes which required approval by the Mexican Congress. If agreed to, an exchange of ratifications could follow immediately. To carry out this final step of diplomacy, President Polk chose U.S. Senator A.H. Sevier, chairman of the Senate committee on foreign relations, and Nathan Clifford, U.S. attorney general. They arrived at Mexico City on April 15, 1848, prepared to meet with Mexican officials for the final exchanges. Another month of internal political unrest followed in Mexico, as the government tried to assemble a quorum of the Congress at Queretaro, the temporary capital. Finally, in mid-May, the quorum was reached, and after a short period of debate the Mexican Chamber of Deputies and Senate accepted the treaty as amended. On May 30, 1848, after several days of formalities, Sevier and Clifford exchanged the ratifications with Mexican authorities and the war was officially ended. The American forces moved quickly to evacuate their 25,000 men from the occupied territory, and by July 30, 1848, the last troops sailed from Vera Cruz harbor, bringing the war of two years and three months to a close.<sup>1</sup>



During the closing months of the war Freamer, Peoples, Scully and Callahan continued to provide detailed coverage of the prospects for peace and the politics of the Mexican Congress.<sup>2</sup> They also made arrangements with Mexican correspondents at Queretaro to report on the efforts to put together a quorum, and then its deliberations. Peoples observed, "To Queretaro alone the eyes of all are fixed."<sup>3</sup> A stumbling block to successful negotiations, he believed, might be the insistence of the Mexicans that no American forces would be allowed to enter their new capital city. "If the Mexicans persist in this and our men yield, I shall be ashamed of our country," Peoples wrote.<sup>4</sup>

One consistent problem the correspondents were having, even in the closing months of the war, was the safe and timely delivery of their mail to the New Orleans papers. It was six months after the capture of Mexico City before the correspondents could somewhat count on their letters arriving safely at Vera Cruz. In the months immediately following the fall of the city they had to rely on private express riders, who still faced the roving bands of guerrillas and bandits, or the irregular deliveries by the army. In March the army put the mail service on a two-a-month basis, but the writers' bundles of letters and newspapers were restricted in size by the military. Finally in late March regular stage coach service was established between the capital and the coast. "We will not have to make our packages so small now," Peoples informed the Crescent.<sup>5</sup> "It is an excellent regulation," Scully of the Picayune wrote, and said the regular

delivery of papers and mail relieved "the monotony of inactivity."<sup>6</sup>

The regular stage did not completely end the robberies, however. On one occasion in April, a band of "ladrones," who had stolen a mail delivery en route to Mexico City, sorted out the letters and demanded two "bits" each (about 12 1/2 cents) for their delivery.<sup>7</sup> On other occasions the mail robberies interfered with the coverage of the Pillow inquiry.<sup>8</sup> About the only safe means of sending a message to Vera Cruz, the correspondents noted with regret, was with the courier from the British legation, who always went through unmolested, or with an American army detachment of at least 50 to 75 men.

In an attempt to overcome the mail problems, all the New Orleans dailies continued to resort to express riders between Mexico City and Vera Cruz whenever the news seemed to warrant it. They continually strived to cut the transit time, the Picayune, on one delivery, making the trip in seven days and seven hours, "the shortest time on record."<sup>9</sup>

Freaner, realizing the importance of the treaty story, established daily communication with his correspondent at Queretaro. If important news came, he wrote to the Delta, "I shall put it through by extraordinary express or go with it myself as far as Vera Cruz."<sup>10</sup> By late April "the all absorbing topic" in Mexico City, Freaner reported, was "will we have peace?" and "what is the news from Queretaro?" Freaner felt it safe to prophesise "the present state of affairs incline us to believe it

is favorable (for peace)."<sup>11</sup> Even robberies and murders appeared suspended, he wrote, "until the affairs of state are settled by the Mexican Congress."<sup>12</sup>

The treaty progress was clear to Scully, too. In a letter to the Picayune in mid-March he said, "We suppose the great question with you now is 'Will it be ratified by the Government at Queretaro?'"<sup>13</sup> With this Scully launched a series of letters analyzing the long process of political and government action which led to the Mexican Congress' acceptance of the revised treaty. In the process of covering the treaty consideration, Scully became the only American reporter to witness the final ratification.

The Mexican friends and enemies of the United States, and the "military plunderers, were all opposed to the treaty," Scully warned his readers.<sup>14</sup> But for different reasons, he explained.

The friends of the United States, or, as they are termed here, 'annexationists,' are composed of the poor, honest, intelligent and industrious portions of the citizens of the country, who have experienced the benefits of our Government, military though it be, who have struggled again and again to strip the church of its overwhelming power — who have struggled also to pull down the military, and who,...look to American occupation as the only remedy for the innumerable evils they are suffering.<sup>15</sup>

So in Scully's estimation, our "friends" were those who favored American annexation to their own independence, while our "enemies" and the "military plunderers" opposed the terms of the treaty as too stiff.

Scully also made arrangements for a Mexican journalist to provide regular coverage from Queretaro. He assured the Picayune, "I have employed a correspondent at that place who will inform you daily of the progress of the treaty before that body, and such other affairs as may be of interest."<sup>16</sup> The journalist at Queretaro forwarded letters in Spanish to Scully in Mexico City, and he in turn translated them and included them in his packets for the New Orleans paper. The letters from the Queretaro writer (the first dated April 13) started running in the Picayune on May 4 and continued until after the American troops departed Mexico City in June.

By mid-April Scully reported there were increasing signs the treaty would be approved. One such sign he said was the activity of the British agent Mackintosh, whom Scully had frequently attacked in his letters. Regarding Mackintosh's support for the revised treaty, Scully reported,

It is true....(for) if he has the shrewdness he has credit for, he will see in the rejection of this treaty the occupation of the country by Americans is inevitable, and his national prejudices, as well as his merchantile interest, would prompt him to work against the event.<sup>17</sup>

Mexican interests were leaning the same way, Scully now believed.

On May 22, the American commissioners, Sevier and Clifford, left Mexico City for the 145-mile trip to Queretaro and the final ceremonies.<sup>18</sup> With them was Scully. Heading the military attachment protecting the American commissioners was Major William H. Polk, the President's brother, and Scully's friend

from the earlier missions against the guerrillas. The four-day trip to the temporary Mexican capital was uneventful, the reporter wrote, although it was the first time American troops had entered the area. Scully, always supportive of the military, noted the troops in Polk's command were all hand-picked "and might challenge the world to a comparison of soldierly appearance and high discipline." Along the route the correspondent was constantly "amused" at the cautious way the Mexican population approached the Americans and their horses, "one of which is as large as two of theirs."<sup>19</sup>

As the American delegation neared Queretaro on May 25 it was met by an escort of sixty Mexican lancers. "Nothing can be more beautiful at a distance than the appearance of those Mexican lancers," the Picayune correspondent noted, adding, "With the tri-colored pennon fluttering from their lance their appearance is picturesque in the extreme." Close up, however, he was disappointed to find their uniforms "gaudy." A large crowd turned out to view the Americans' entrance into the city, crowding "streets, doorways and roof tops," Scully reported. But the reception was slightly deceptive, because after reaching their quarters the American troops had stones thrown at them. "It was feared that a collision would take place between our troops and the people," Scully later reported, but Polk took steps to have the local authorities maintain order.<sup>20</sup>

The next day Scully watched as the American representatives presented their credentials to Mexican President Manuel de

la Pena y Pena and his cabinet. His report included verbatim copies of the formal addresses presented by each side. One day later, May 27, the entire American delegation met the Mexican President. Looking over the proceedings, Scully observed, "They were received in a very plainly, indeed I might say meanly, furnished room in a private house near the suburbs of the city." The Mexican President shook hands with all the Americans in the delegation and talked with Clifford and Polk for about 15 minutes, both sides expressing hopes for "a speedy peace and long harmony between the two countries."<sup>21</sup>

Although the only step remaining was to exchange the final treaty ratifications, a two-day delay followed. The cause, Scully explained, was that the Mexican government's national seal was in Mexico City and the President and his cabinet had decided it was needed to make the document official. While waiting for the express riders to return with it, Scully spent his time touring through Queretaro and gathering information about the large number of American army deserters, now members of the Mexican army, who were reported camped nearby. "As well as I can learn there are about one thousand deserters, or men whose terms of services in the American army expired...enrolled in the Mexican army," he wrote.<sup>22</sup> "These men have been the preservers of Pena y Pena from revolution," Scully claimed. Reminding his readers of the volatility of contemporary Mexican politics, and the fact many politicians did not want peace, he said the American

deserters already had suppressed one insurrection for the Mexican government. "The Mexicans, soldiers and citizens, have the greatest fear of them," he claimed, putting a unique twist on the correspondents' constant theme that the Mexicans always feared the ability of American troops - even if they happened to be deserters from the American army.

The official seal arrived on May 30 and Scully closed his letter that night: "Half-past 7 P.M. - The treaty has just been signed by (Minister Luis de la) Rosa and the Commissioners, and peace is made."<sup>23</sup>

At Mexico City the correspondents were well prepared for reporting the final acceptance of the treaty. "We are looking forward to ratification from day to day," Frenner wrote on May 16. He assured the Delta, "I have made all the necessary arrangements to forward it immediately to Vera Cruz."<sup>24</sup> The Delta, Picayune and Crescent all had worked out arrangements with their Mexican representatives in Queretaro to forward the developments by express. The express riders usually covered the 145 miles between the two cities in 24 to 26 hours, depending on the bandit and guerrilla activity.<sup>25</sup>

The final story broke in three parts: the critical vote of the Chamber of Deputies on May 19; the Senate vote on May 24, which was considered the terminating event; and the ratification exchange on May 30. The British legation courier was the first to reach Vera Cruz with the news of the first two events, and

thus the source of the initial reports of the votes in the New Orleans papers. The newspapers' own sources brought the final news. The stories on the concluding actions appeared in the New Orleans press May 31, June 4 and June 8.

Freaner had taken double care that his messages would get through to the Delta, sending off two separate express riders each time news arrived.<sup>26</sup> The Delta may have felt a bit of disappointment by the speed of the British courier, for it later heard from Freaner that his express with the final ratification news had been the first to arrive at Mexico City from Queretaro.<sup>27</sup> The British messenger, however, had traveled directly to Vera Cruz with the news, without the stop at Mexico City which the messengers of the American newspapers made.

With Scully at Queretaro, Callahan handled the story and arrangements for the Picayune at Mexico City. The final news reached Callahan on the afternoon of May 26 by express. Callahan quickly made arrangements to forward the news to Vera Cruz, and then on to the States. His messenger reached Vera Cruz on May 31, and the next day boarded a government steamer, the Water Witch, for New Orleans. He arrived there June 7, and the following morning, under a small headline reading "Later from Mexico," the Picayune announced, "Peace is considered made."<sup>28</sup> By June 13 Washington had the news, and, as Mexican War historian Justin Smith has noted, "With all speed it ran from city to city, from town to town, from vale to vale; and everywhere it was greeted with quiet but heartfelt rejoicing."<sup>29</sup>



With the peace completed, the Americans moved rapidly to leave the country. The American Star, after publishing daily for eight months in the occupied capital, came out for the final time on May 30. The New Orleans Crescent, which published Peoples' correspondence from Mexico City, stated there should be "no regrets" when the Star closed "because with the end of the war ends the mission of the Star and its efficient editor." Instead, the Crescent observed, the country should praise Peoples for his "pioneer work" and the quality of the papers he conducted at Matamoros, Tampico, Vera Cruz, Jalapa, Puebla and Mexico City.<sup>30</sup>

Peoples had anticipated the closing of the Star for some time. In mid-May, as it became increasingly obvious the American army would be leaving, Peoples became involved in "another adventure," as he described it.<sup>31</sup> It was a proposal to help organize an "army of from one to five thousand" of the disbanded Americans to help rule Mexico until the regular government was on its feet again. Foreign interests in Mexico City were to pay the army's salaries in the interim, in return for protection. "It was not intended for me to organize and command that force," Peoples explained, "but to publicize it among our officers and men."<sup>32</sup> The idea failed to materialize, however.

Peoples next tried to organize an expedition of discharged soldiers to settle in California. However, the plans fell through when word came health conditions and the availability of ships on the western Mexican coast were uncertain. A

proposal was made to organize an expedition to Yucatan, instead, and Peoples decided to try it out. In the Star of May 27 he ran the following:

FOR YUCATAN — A number of young men belonging to and accompanying the American army in Mexico have expressed a strong desire to go to the assistance of the whites in Yucatan....Those who wish to spend the summer in a delightful country, rather than return to their homes in the dull season, can find no better place than to do so in Yucatan; whilst at the same time, they can assist the whites against the merciless Indians, and benefit themselves immeasurably.<sup>33</sup>

Interested persons were urged to see Peoples at the Star office for further details, the editor stating that an army of 400 or 500 would be raised for the expedition. He next wrote to the editors of the New Orleans papers asking for their support, and they responded by printing a number of stories and announcements about the plan. A Yucatan committee was organized in New Orleans and the editors of La Patria, the New Orleans Spanish-language paper, became directly involved in the project.<sup>34</sup>

At Mexico City Peoples proceeded with his plans, several experienced army unit commanders quickly joining him.<sup>35</sup> Peoples described the group as "citizens and mechanics — not the 'low thieves' following the army."<sup>36</sup> At first the American commander at Mexico City, Major General William D. Butler, told Peoples soldiers could muster out at Mexico City if they chose to, which would allow them to join the proposed army. Peoples distributed a handbill under his own name with the information, and as a consequence Butler was swamped with applications for resignation.

Faced with a new problem, the general decided all personnel would have to return to New Orleans for discharge.<sup>37</sup>

Peoples called Butler's decision a "severe blow," but would not give up on the Yucatan expedition. After leaving Mexico City June 6, Peoples made stops at Perote, Jalapa and Vera Cruz to contact personnel in various army units.<sup>38</sup> (The troops were being kept out of the yellow fever coastal areas until sufficient ships could arrive to disembark them.) Finally he decided to go to Yucatan to check the prospects for the proposed expedition; "on a Republican mission," as another Crescent correspondent called it.<sup>39</sup> En route he spent the 4th of July "becalmed on a small schooner with 12 people who could not speak English and not even a glass of old rye 'bald-face'...to stir one's patriotism." He spent the time dreaming of sitting with the Crescent staff in New Orleans, drinking "iced cobbblers and juleps."<sup>40</sup>

At Merida, the capital of Yucatan, he found chaos. "The government is in a most deplorable condition," he wrote to the Crescent. The whites there, he reported, "feel foreign intervention necessary to save themselves from the Indians."<sup>41</sup> He later explained he went there thinking it was a struggle for independence, only to find the peninsula would revert back to Mexico if the Indians were defeated. Additionally, he found "that the Indians were more than half right in opposing...the Spaniards." He was disappointed. "I was in search of...excitement, for which (my) appetite had grown by what it had fed on in

Mexico," he wrote.<sup>42</sup>

Nevertheless, before leaving, he entered into an agreement "to land an American expedition in Yucatan." But in a letter to the Crescent he said he feared "it will be of little avail" since the American officers most interested, did not get their discharges at New Orleans.<sup>43</sup> The project never materialized. Peoples returned to Vera Cruz on July 21 and found the city "literally deserted." Thinking back over his Mexican experiences, he wrote, "To me it is almost impossible to realize the efforts and labors of the past 15 months — they are too dreamy — too felicitous to be apparent as a 'sure enough' fact...."<sup>44</sup>

Meanwhile, at Mexico City, the Delta's Frenner also was planning to leave. Reflecting the mood there, Frenner wrote:

In 10 days or less the army will be on the move to the coast...(soon) they will be among you — you will then see the boys who 'have been baptized in blood and come out steel' — they have 'conquered a peace' at the point of a bayonet, and for the sake of humanity and justice, let them revel for one night in the 'Halls of White Settlements' before sending them down to Yucatan to be eaten by mosquitoes and sand fleas.<sup>45</sup>

After dispatching the final messages from Queretaro, Frenner fell ill and was bed-ridden most of his final two weeks in Mexico City. The Delta commented, "...the sickness of Mustang has deprived our (readers) for a short time the benefit of his enterprise, energy and judgment in obtaining and forwarding news." A friend of Frenner's notified the paper that the reporter was being cared for "by the people of the house in which he lives" and that

Mustang planned to leave for the coast June 7 "if he has to be tied to the tail of a jackass."<sup>46</sup> Frenner later described his illness as "severe," and it was two weeks before he could send a short note to the Delta telling the details for the final evacuation at Mexico City.<sup>47</sup> In a final letter, written June 9, Frenner closed his two-year career of reporting the war with the results of an investigation. An English firm which had worked for Santa Anna when he was in power, he wrote, had been the chief provisions contractor for the U.S. army at Mexico City. It was being suggested, Frenner said, expressing disillusionment, "that Santa Anna has been enjoying a portion of the profits (from the American contracts)."<sup>48</sup>

Frenner appears to have been the last American reporter to leave the capital. Callahan went first, but Peoples noted the rest were "waiting to see the performance to the end." He added, "For myself, I saw the Flag put up, and I will endeavor to see it hauled down."<sup>49</sup> He changed his mind, however, and left Mexico City on June 6 with General Twiggs' division, "which I have been with ever since it left Monterey."<sup>50</sup> Before departing he made arrangements with a Mexican journalist to continue the Crescent's correspondence from Mexico City, as had the Delta and Picayune.

In the closing months of the war the reporters universally expressed regrets over the contents of the final peace treaty and the state of affairs for the American troops in Mexico. It is clear from their letters that they too felt a sense of loss as the war moved towards its conclusion. Peoples appears to have

been expressing the feelings of all when he wrote, "the efforts and labors of the past 15 months — they are too dreamy — too felicitous to be apparent as a 'sure enough' fact." But they continued their detailed coverage to the end, making elaborate arrangements to be first in delivering it to New Orleans. We see, too, at this point that the Delta, thanks to Frenner's efforts, had caught up with the Picayune's reporting enterprise. They matched each other's efforts rather evenly during the final four months of the conflict, as did their new competitor, the Crescent. Scully's reports from Queretaro, the only ones filed by an American reporter, still remain as one of the few recorded eyewitness accounts of the ratification exchange. The last story had been filed, and all that remained for the correspondents was the final trip home.

## NOTES

1. Smith, op. cit., II: 248-252.
2. For examples see New Orleans Crescent, April 4, May 8, 1848; New Orleans Delta, April 23, May 23, 1848; New Orleans Picayune, March 24, April 23, May 23, 1848.
3. New Orleans Crescent, May 8, 1848.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., March 30, 1848.
6. New Orleans Picayune, April 23, 1848.
7. New Orleans Crescent, May 8, 1848.
8. New Orleans Picayune, April 23, 1848.
9. Ibid., May 27, 1848.
10. New Orleans Delta, April 23, 1848.
11. Ibid., May 9, 1848.
12. Ibid., May 23, 1848.
13. New Orleans Picayune, March 24, 1848.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid., April 23, 1848.
17. Ibid.
18. Smith, op. cit., II: 250; New Orleans Picayune, June 15, 1848.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.; also New Orleans Crescent, June 16, 1848.
21. New Orleans Picayune, June 15, 1848.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.

24. New Orleans Delta, May 31, 1848.
25. Ibid., May 21, 1848.
26. Ibid., May 31, June 6, 1848.
27. Ibid. The British courier made the fast trips to the coast in order to put the news aboard the regular bi-monthly British government mail ship bound for Liverpool.
28. New Orleans Picayune, June 8, 1848.
29. Smith, op. cit., II: 251; Washington Union, June 13,17, 1848.
30. New Orleans Crescent, June 8, 1848.
31. Ibid., May 27, 1848.
32. Ibid.
33. Quoted in New Orleans Crescent, June 8, 1848.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid., June 16, 1848.
36. Ibid., June 8, 1848.
37. Ibid., June 15,16, 1848. The American government also wanted to dampen the various filibustering projects.
38. Ibid., June 21,27, July 3, 1848.
39. Ibid., July 9, 1848.
40. Ibid., July 22, 1848.
41. Ibid., July 28, 1848.
42. Ibid., October 18, 1848.
43. Ibid., July 28, 1848. The U.S. Government made them go to Baton Rouge, Louisiana for discharge.
44. Ibid.
45. New Orleans Delta, June 6, 1848. The reference was to Peoples' proposed Yucatan expedition.



46. Ibid., June 16, 1848.
47. Ibid., June 22, 1848.
48. Ibid.
49. New Orleans Crescent, June 16, 1848.
50. Ibid., June 21, 1848.

## CHAPTER 22

### NEWSPAPER SUPPRESSION AND CENSORSHIP

The Mexican War, 1846-48, coming soon after the start of the penny press era, was the first foreign war reported extensively by the American press. Daily newspapers provided organized coverage of the American expeditionary forces and made expensive, elaborate arrangements to have the news carried back to the United States. Even more important to the war's coverage, a large number of American printers followed in the wake of the army and established "war" newspapers in Mexico. Before the conflict was over enterprising Yankee journalists established 20 such publications in 13 Mexican cities. Serving both the troops at the front and the public at home, these papers provided much of the war's news.<sup>1</sup> Mexican newspapers, which often attempted to keep publishing even in occupied cities, formed a third important source of news about the war.

A number of scholars have found that wartime conditions often bring about conflict between the press and the military.<sup>2</sup> This proved to be the case in the Mexican War, as well. For a considerable time during the conflict large areas of Mexico had to be occupied by American troops, many of them poorly trained

volunteers. Undermanned and spread thin over hundreds of miles, the rear area troops often were harassed by guerrilla forces and hostile civilian populations. Order usually was enforced through the strict use of martial law.<sup>3</sup>

These strained conditions eventually caused conflicts between American military authorities and the local press, resulting in at least seven incidents of newspaper suppression. Paradoxically, there were no overt or official cases of censorship involving the American correspondents or their stateside newspapers. The stateside press, far removed from the battlefields and occupation zones, remained vocal, often critical, about the course of the war. But time and distance served to lessen the impact of its words, and at the same time made it generally immune from the military. But the American "war papers" and their local Mexican counterparts did not fare as well. In the same manner it found martial law effective in controlling civilian populations, the army found these broad, vague powers a useful tool to silence newspaper critics.

Two small Mexican-operated newspapers at Matamoros in northern Mexico were the first to be closed by the military authorities. The incidents occurred during the three-month period in summer, 1846 while Zachary Taylor made Matamoros his headquarters. Several American newspapers had started in the town, including the Matamoros Reveille. It was operated by the Texas printers Samuel Bangs and Gideon Lewis. The bilingual Reveille had three pages printed in English and a fourth page

printed in Spanish. The latter actually was a separate newspaper, La Diana de Matamoros, run by a Mexican editor from the same shop as the Reveille.<sup>4</sup>

It was the Spanish-language section which caused the problems for the Reveille. While Bangs and Lewis were supporting the American cause in their portion of the paper, the Mexican editor was attacking the American government and its war position. Taylor, using a loosely defined set of martial law regulations,<sup>5</sup> moved quickly to shut down the entire print shop, banning the Reveille as well. Only after the two Texans were able to convince Taylor they had neither written nor published the attack did the general allow the publications to resume — but without La Diana de Matamoros.<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile, another Spanish-language paper, El Liberal, violently anti-American in tone, began publication in the town. American papers marveled at the appearance of El Liberal. It was "proof of the respect of our people for the liberty of the press," the New Orleans Courier commented.<sup>7</sup> The Picayune suggested Mexican editors should use the example of El Liberal being started behind American lines "in their denunciations of the tyrannical law" gagging them in their own country.<sup>8</sup> The Charleston Courier said the presence of the Mexican paper "shows in the strongest light (our) determination to be exceedingly tolerant and liberal towards (the conquered)."<sup>9</sup> The American military authorities did not share this view, however, and El Liberal was closed by Taylor

after one issue.<sup>10</sup>

Another Matamoros paper which troubled Taylor was the American-operated Republic of the Rio Grande. Operators of the paper were J.N. Fleeson, a New Orleans printer, and Hugh McLeod, a Texas land promoter who was hoping the four northern states of Mexico would revolt and form an independent republic and possibly annex to the United States (much in the manner of Texas).<sup>11</sup> Editorials in the paper urged Mexican citizens in the surrounding area to rise up and overthrow the Mexican military government. The aggressive tone of the paper soon earned the Polk Administration's displeasure, and Taylor was ordered to close the publication "because the government does not agree with its object of a revolution in North Mexico."<sup>12</sup>

McLeod was forced to quit and the name of the paper was changed to the American Flag. The Flag denied reports in New Orleans newspapers that Taylor had insisted on the changes, stating the general "never interfered with us in the publication of our paper or suggested a change in either the name or tone." It added:

The general knew it was in the hands of Americans -- men who did not follow up the army for speculation...and he looked for no sentiment from them that was not American.<sup>13</sup>

The changes were made, nevertheless, and John Peoples, the printer-army volunteer who was to play a major role in the press coverage of the war, joined Fleeson in running the publication. Ironically, after its shaky start, the Flag went on to be the

longest running of the war papers, surviving right to the end of the conflict in July, 1848.

There was little press comment in the States regarding Taylor's action, and what there was supported him. The Baltimore Sun stated:

In judging this matter we must not view it as a restriction of the 'liberty of the press' — it is a restriction of the press from an abuse of privilege. There is no such thing as liberty of the press in Matamoros, by civil law, and certainly it cannot have existence under the general despotism of military rule.<sup>14</sup>

Any war newspaper which did not limit itself to only reporting news would be a danger to the success of the invasion, the Sun argued, adding Taylor's army could not tolerate the "nuisance" of newspaper critics. Otherwise, the Sun pointed out, "Every dissatisfied soldier would rush to its columns to pour out his complaints, parties would be formed, strife engendered, insubordination ensue and the commanding officer soon find himself in an (intolerable) plight...."<sup>15</sup>

The administration's newspaper, the Washington Union, strongly argued this position, stating if any American newspaper in Mexico took an anti-war stand it would be the commanding general's duty "to silence such organs of flagrant treason" on grounds they'd be protracting the war by giving "aid and comfort to the enemy." Under martial law, the Union pointed out, such acts against the press were legal.<sup>16</sup>

The first case of an American-operated paper being closed occurred at Monterrey in Summer 1847. Taylor's army had captured

the city the previous September, but the military authorities had resisted the establishment of an American newspaper for five months on the grounds it would "be in violation of the wishes of the government at home."<sup>17</sup> Finally, in February, 1847, the military turned over a captured press belonging to the Mexican state of New Leon to a group of American printers.<sup>18</sup> The new paper, American Pioneer, was published by William S. Goff and J.D. Onslow. A New Orleans printer, Durant da Ponte, was associate editor and publisher.<sup>19</sup> The Pioneer came to an abrupt end the following June when Major Jubel Early of the Virginia Volunteers, acting military governor, ordered it shut down. A correspondent of the New Orleans Delta explained everything "had gone smoothly until the Pioneer commenced to expose some of the rascally proceedings" of the city's Mexican civil government. The Mexicans immediately demanded that Early return their press. "He, in his goal to gain the good-will of the Mexicans, immediately complied," the Delta's correspondent wrote.<sup>20</sup>

The scene of action next shifted to central Mexico, after Scott landed his invasion army. Scott, more strict than Taylor in applying military regulations, issued a highly detailed martial law regulation, titled General Order No. 20.<sup>21</sup> It gave local commanders broad powers for enforcing the regulations, including the power to establish military commissions to try all offenders. Paragraph 11 of the order stated, however, that "any punishment" inflicted by such a commission had to be "in conformity with

known punishments, in like cases, in some one of the States of the United States of America."<sup>22</sup>

Behind it, Scott's army left a vulnerable, undermanned communications-supply line. This situation led to the suppression of two more Mexican newspapers, and the harassment of others. At Jalapa, when the American army moved forward in August, 1847, the temporary office of Peoples' American Star was taken over by an outspoken Mexican publication, Boletin del Noticias. The threat of American censorship apparently did not scare the Boletin's editor. He even censured Santa Anna's government paper at Mexico City, Diario del Gobierno, for "talking so much about the possibility of peace."<sup>23</sup>

"Intercepted Correspondence" was a standing headline in the Boletin, and was used for printing items going to and from the American army which the local guerrillas had captured and passed along to the Boletin's editor. He was careful, he explained, not to use all of the intercepted American correspondence, considering it imprudent "lest his sheet should fall into the hands of Americans."<sup>24</sup> The editor showed a compassionate side, too, pleading clemency for intercepted couriers.

But in October (1847) the editor went too far for the American military authorities when he suggested the guerrillas in the nearby mountains should occupy the city and make prisoners of all who were cooperating with the Americans. The American area commander, Colonel F.W. Wynkoop of the Pennsylvania Volunteers took a detachment to the paper's office and confiscated its



press and type. "He would have destroyed them," wrote a Delta correspondent, if a delegation of city leaders hadn't arrived and promised that it wouldn't happen again. The Delta writer added, "For my own part...I managed to pi some two or three galleys of live matter and upset a full case of head type."<sup>25</sup>

An American paper came into existence at Puebla in November, 1847 as the replacement for another outspoken Mexican publication. A correspondent of the Delta reported the incident occurred when a Mexican editor in the city, identified as "Senor Don Rivera," distributed a number of "inflammatory" items "inviting the patriotic gentlemen of Puebla,...to rise in arms and patriotically cut the throats of the six hundred sick Yankees" in the garrison.<sup>26</sup> A revolt followed and the American forces had to call in reinforcements to put it down. After the streets were clear again, the correspondent wrote, the American commander "very naturally felt anxious to know where his amiable friend Rivera's office was. He sent (a) company to 'purchase' the establishment, together with its proprietor." Rivera got word the troops were coming, however, and escaped before they arrived.<sup>27</sup>

Trouble with Mexican civil authorities at Vera Cruz led to the suppression of another American newspaper, the Genius of Liberty. This paper was started September 25, 1847 by Dr. Michael J. Quin and R. Mathewson.<sup>28</sup> Part of the usefulness of the Genius of Liberty, as the Americans in Vera Cruz saw it, was to criticize the operation of the civilian government in the captured city. The Vera Cruz City Council, appointed and sustained by the

American military authorities, particularly bothered the American community since it included some Mexicans who previously had fought against the invaders. When the Genius of Liberty complained about how the council was spending tax funds, the councilmen attempted to silence it by threatening to withhold the city's legal advertising. A correspondent of the New Orleans Delta, expressing outrage over the action, said it was taken because "the editors used the privilege which our glorious Constitution guarantees to all — even aliens who had taken shelter under our Flag — the privilege of expressing publically and fearlessly their opinions of the public acts of public servants."<sup>29</sup>

The council did, however, switch the city's advertising to the Mexican-owned Arco Iris, a paper the New Orleans Delta said "constantly sneers at our government, army and our way of doing things."<sup>30</sup> The disappointed Quin called the editors of the Arco Iris "the avowed enemies of our Republic."<sup>31</sup> The American military governor, Colonel Henry Wilson of the 1st Infantry, did not agree, however, and allowed the council to switch its patronage to the Spanish-language paper.

Quin was soon into more serious trouble with Wilson. Early in November, 1847, the editor criticized the laxness of the civil court of corrections, which was appointed by Wilson. The court, composed of two military personnel, summoned Quin and Mathewson before it, and without trial found them guilty of contempt and fined them \$200. It also denied their demand to appeal

the decision to General Scott. "This raised the dander of Dr. Quin," noted a correspondent of the Delta.<sup>32</sup> In his next issue Quin wrote a general attack about Wilson's administration of the city. Wilson retaliated by sending a detail of troops to the Genius of Liberty office, closed it and jailed Quin and Mathewson.<sup>33</sup>

Wilson appointed a military commission to study the case, but when it refused to act the governor decided to be the sole judge in the matter. Ruling under the power of martial law, he gave the editors the choice of staying in prison or leaving the country immediately. When the editors protested the decision would cost them their entire investment, Wilson suggested they'd have no trouble getting 50% of its worth. Quin called Wilson's statement "preposterous," and said if Wilson believed it he could buy the facility at that price. A mob, meanwhile, had entered the unguarded print shop and looted and ransacked it.<sup>34</sup>

With no alternative, Quin and Mathewson left for New Orleans on the next ship. The bitter Quin called his expulsion characteristic "of the good old times, when tyrant tories, stamp act laws and star chamber decrees reigned rampant in the land."<sup>35</sup> If Wilson felt slandered, Quin argued, he had "recourse to moral expedients" and could have appealed to the American community for vindication. Instead, the editor stated, Wilson chose "the physical and savage (expedients) of bayonet, forcible gagging, imprisonment and banishment."<sup>36</sup> Wilson's action also left the remaining newspapermen in Vera Cruz angry. "Gov. Wilson has

renewed the old Alien and Sedition Law of the Elder Adams," the Delta's correspondent complained, continuing, "The President of the United States cannot stop a press there, no matter what it may say of him. Yet this little magistrate down here is capable of exercising a tyranny only the prerogative of despots."<sup>37</sup> Other correspondents derisively referred to the military governor as "Old Mother Wilson" and "The Conqueror of the Genius of Liberty."<sup>38</sup>

Another American paper, described as "much in the style of the Genius of Liberty," soon opened in Vera Cruz. It was called the Free American and was edited and published by F.A. Devilliers, a former New Orleans printer. Like his predecessors, Devilliers constantly battled with the Mexican civil authorities, but he managed to hold out for more than six months before being suspended. In February he fought a duel with a Mexican editor and was shot in the leg.<sup>39</sup> Early in May (1848) the Mexican mayor of Vera Cruz attempted to prosecute Devilliers in a Mexican court for an item he had published. The American lieutenant governor interceded by writing a strong letter of protest to the mayor and the matter was dropped. "Considerable excitement was created in the American community by the action," the Delta reported.<sup>40</sup>

Devilliers' trouble with the American military governor came unexpectedly, and somewhat inexplicably. On June 8 as the Americans were withdrawing from the country, the paper ran a small item headed, sarcastically, "A Tribute of Respect for the Treaty of Peace, But not the Last." The story, four inches in

length, told of the murder of two American stragglers by a band of Mexicans after the main American force had withdrawn from the city of Orizaba. The article, written in the flamboyant antebellum style used frequently in the war papers, concluded:

When our troops heard of the infamous conduct of these cowards, several officers and men begged for revenge, but they were not permitted to chase the murderers because peace was made and... (the dead men's) blood still cries for vengeance. But peace is made!<sup>41</sup>

Early the next morning, June 9, Devilliers was awakened by a soldier and handed a note to report immediately to General Persifor F. Smith, the new American governor. On arrival at headquarters, the editor was shown into a room where General Smith was standing with several of the city's Mexican officials. Without any prior explanation the editor was surprised to find himself being severely reprimanded. "After having been called by names not before given to me," Devilliers complained, "I was ordered to leave the city in 12 hours!"<sup>42</sup>

Summarily dismissed, Devilliers had time only to pack and complete one more issue of the Free American. A final editorial to his "friends and patrons" stated:

What have I done to be treated so harshly? Have I not always supported my countrymen when they were in the right? Under the administrations of several Commanders of this Department, you all know that no cause of complaint was given by my paper; in fact, that my language was always respectful, and that I ever kept within the bounds of TRUTH.

.....  
Difference between an American and a Mexican  
Newspaper in this Country — The Mexican papers

are allowed to call American soldiers robbers, murderers, etc. etc. An American paper must be silent or die....I still breathe the air which was given to me by the Power of Heaven. How dear is freedom to one who momentarily expects to be deprived of it.<sup>43</sup>

The next day, June 10, Devilliers was taken to the dock under military escort and put on a ship bound for New Orleans. His co-editor, a Cuban who handled the Spanish-language portion of the paper, was kept in prison until June 13 when he too was taken directly to the dock and put on a ship to New Orleans. "It is truly perplexing," observed the Delta's Vera Cruz correspondent, "to see a man who has been for the past twelve months advocating the American cause thus ignominiously thrust out of the country — a man who cannot speak the first word of (English)."<sup>44</sup>

The suspension of the Free American was the only newspaper closing of the war which drew criticism from the American press. It was muted, however, because General Smith was one of the war's heroes. "We must say that this appears to us rather a summary mode of procedure," the New Orleans Crescent stated.<sup>45</sup> A New Orleans Delta editorial echoed, "There must be some mistake surely in this, as no American officer...would be guilty of issuing so arbitrary an order on so slight a (sic) pretence."<sup>46</sup> The Picayune praised General Smith, but added: "The punishment inflicted on the editor...was quite disproportionate to the offense committed. We can scarcely acquiesce in the exercise of such power save in a critical emergency during war, of which we see no evidence in this case..."<sup>47</sup> Whatever the case for Devilliers it was quickly forgotten, and Smith returned to New

Orleans several weeks later to a hero's welcome.

Correspondents in the Mexican War did not suffer from traditional censorship restraints which occurred in later wars. For the most part the writers were highly laudatory of the army's performance, and what criticism did occur dealt with politics more often than military affairs. The army's few attempts to control reports leaving the war zones were aimed mostly at military personnel writing letters critical of others in the service. At any rate, the newspaper correspondents do not appear to have caused lasting problems for the military since no censorship apparatus or regulations were instituted.

However, the presense of the American-operated newspapers in the war zone provided a unique aspect to censorship during the war. The army, which had not fought in a foreign country previously, and had no prior experience with wartime censorship, had few guidelines to follow. Many of the war papers were not bothered by military authorities because they helped maintain local control, and in a number of instances were supported by the military patronage. When necessary, however, the army commanders do not appear to have been hesitant to use martial law to silence local press critics. As a result three American-operated and four Mexican-operated newspapers were suppressed when local military authorities felt they were, at least in some manner, a threat to local military control. No lasting precedent was set by these actions, other than perhaps to show martial law can be useful

for control when needed by military authorities. On the whole, the American press enjoyed a wide latitude of freedom in its coverage of the conflict.



## NOTES

1. The best study of these newspapers is Iota M. Spell, "The Anglo-Saxon Press in Mexico, 1846-1848," American Historical Review, 38 (October 1932) 1:20-31. There are few published works on the role of the American press during the Mexican War; the best is Fayette Copeland, Kendall of the Picayune (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1943).
2. For related studies see Donald L. Shaw and Stephen W. Brauer, "Press Freedom and War Constraints: Case Testing Siebert's Proposition II," Journalism Quarterly 46: 243-54; Charles H. Brown, "Press Censorship in the Spanish-American War," Journalism Quarterly, 42: 363-72; John D. Stevens, "Press and Community Toleration: Wisconsin in World War I," Journalism Quarterly 46: 255-259; also extensive material on the subject in Edwin Emery, Press and America, 3rd edition, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1972) Chaps. 14, 24. Also important to this topic is Fredrick S. Siebert, Freedom of the Press in England 1476-1776 (Urbana, Ill., 1952). Siebert's noted Proposition II, "The area of freedom contracts and the enforcement of restraints increases as the stresses on the stability of the government and the structure of society increase," best fits the Mexican War press experience.
3. For a thorough discussion of the American military rule of Mexico see Justin H. Smith, The War with Mexico (2 vols., New York: The Macmillan Co., 1919) II: 210-232. In general, decision regarding civil matters were left in the hands of the local military governors, who were appointed by the overall commander of the army operating in the area.
4. Spell, op. cit., p. 23; Matamoros Reveille, June 24, 1846.
5. Taylor generally was lax in enforcing martial law, usually making judgments on liberal interpretations of his orders from Washington. See Smith, op. cit., II: 210-215.
6. St. Louis Reveille, August 20, 1846.
7. New Orleans Picayune, July 26, 1846.
8. Ibid.
9. Charleston Courier, August 1, 1846.
10. St. Louis Reveille, August 4, 1846; New Orleans Picayune, July 26, 1846.
11. Spell, op. cit., p. 22.

12. New Orleans Delta, September 9, 1846.
13. Matamoros American Flag, August 23, 1846, quoted in Charleston Courier, September 3, 1846.
14. Baltimore Sun, August 19, 1846.
15. Ibid.
16. Washington Union, May 27, 1847.
17. New Orleans Delta, November 3, 1846.
18. Ibid., July 6, 1847.
19. Spell, op. cit., p. 24.
20. New Orleans Delta, July 6, 1847.
21. Full title of the order was Headquarters of the Army, Tampico, February 19, 1847, General Orders No. 20. See Smith, op. cit., II: 210-220, 455-456.
22. Ibid., II: 456.
23. Jalapa (Mexico) Boletin del Noticias, August 3, 1847, quoted in New Orleans Picayune, August 31, 1847.
24. Boletin del Noticias, August 13, 1847, quoted in New Orleans Picayune, August 31, 1847.
25. New Orleans Delta, November 9, 1847.
26. Ibid., November 20, 1847.
27. Ibid.
28. New Orleans Picayune, October 5, 1847; Spell, op. cit., p. 29. Spell spells Quin with two n's. Contemporary newspapers, however, spelled it with one. See New Orleans Delta, January 8, 1848 for a signed notice by Quin, using one n.
29. New Orleans Delta, November 7, 1847.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid., January 8, 1848.
32. Ibid., November 25, 1847.

33. Ibid.
34. Ibid., January 8, 1848.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid., November 25, 1847.
38. Ibid., May 23, 1848.
39. Ibid., March 8, 1848.
40. Ibid., May 19, 1848.
41. Vera Cruz Free American, June 8, 1848, quoted in New Orleans Delta, June 16, 1848.
42. New Orleans Crescent, June 16, 1848.
43. Vera Cruz Free American, June 9, 1848, quoted in New Orleans Crescent, June 16, 1848.
44. New Orleans Delta, June 22, 1848.
45. New Orleans Crescent, June 16, 1848.
46. New Orleans Delta, June 16, 1848.
47. New Orleans Picayune, June 16, 1848.

## CHAPTER 23

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

As the war reached its final days the reporters started turning to other activities. Kendall went to Europe to work on a history of the war and didn't return to New Orleans for several years. His colleague Haile left the army in July, 1848 and returned to editing a weekly paper in Plaquemine, Louisiana. But he had contracted yellow fever before leaving Vera Cruz, and died from it in September, 1849 after a lingering illness. Freaner worked briefly for the U.S. government in the war's closing weeks, helping to dispose of government stores and property at Vera Cruz. He returned to New Orleans to work for the Delta, and later joined the competition Picayune to cover the California gold rush. Another Picayune correspondent, John E. Durivage, also went to California to report on the gold rush and stayed to work on several California newspapers.

The intrepid John Peoples decided not to organize an expedition to Yucatan, and instead chose to return to Corpus Christi, Texas, where Taylor's army had first camped, to start a new American Star. Joining him was his old reporting friend from Mexico, the Picayune's Charles Callahan. Scully's post-war

activities, like his first name, remain lost for the present. Lumsden returned to his co-editor position at the Picayune and worked there until his death in 1860. Tobey picked up his career as reporter in Philadelphia after the fighting ended, and Warland returned to Boston to work as a reporter and editor.

The rest of the nation's press returned to its normal activities as well. By July, 1848, as the final troops were pulling out of Vera Cruz, even the Picayune, the leader of the war's coverage, admitted, "The pressure of European news upon our columns compels us to cut short Mexican affairs." That the nation's press as a whole benefitted from the coverage of the Mexican War has been touched upon in this study. The papers at home, particularly the major penny press leader in the country's major metropolitan centers responded to the demands from the reading public to provide extensive and rapid (rapid by the standards of the day) coverage of the events in Mexico. Looked at as a whole, the major contribution of this segment of the press was in the area of news transmission. By utilizing the nation's existing communication systems -- primarily pony express, steamboats, telegraph and railroads -- the penny press editors constantly cut the time required to bring the news from the distant battlefields. They repeatedly showed enterprise and innovation in transmitting the news. When the war came to an end they turned the lessons learned to other areas, particularly concerning coverage of European events. The Mexican War coverage

certainly did not settle the conflict within American journalism over which form — penny press or political/mercantile press — would emerge as the most dominant. But it did provide an extended news reporting challenge uniquely suited to the spirit and journalism philosophy of the penny press leaders. The leadership in the war's coverage almost exclusively came from the journalists who subscribed to the penny press philosophy. And this was a fact apparently appreciated by the American public, which supported, even demanded, the extensive coverage of the war's events. The concept of "racing for the news" and rushing it out in continuous extra editions fit perfectly with the public's attitude about the events in Mexico.

Paradoxically, while the penny press in the Northeast cities worked continually to cut down the time it took to deliver the war news to the readers, for the most part it was content to print second-hand accounts of that news. There was little hesitation by the penny press editors to reprint the articles in the New Orleans Picayune and Delta, and, later, the Crescent. The political papers were guided by their political convictions for the most part, but overall did not hesitate to use the correspondence of the New Orleans papers. The widespread practice of using "exchanges," the news provided from the free copies of other newspapers, may account for this. This practice can even be seen as a predecessor to cooperative or wire service news. It runs deep in journalism history, of course, and is not limited to American newspapers or the Mexican War period, but it nevertheless

was influential in selecting sources of news, and in this case selecting sources of news about Mexico.

One immediate effect the use of "exchanges" had was to greatly increase the influence of the New Orleans papers. Being closest to the scene of action, and having had a pre-war news interest in expansion, Texas and Mexico, they moved rapidly to provide detailed coverage of the events after fighting broke out. Added to this was the accidental circumstance that it was the start of the slow summer business season in New Orleans when Zachary Taylor's troops first met the Mexicans. This resulted in a large number of printers being available to volunteer for service in the army. In turn this resulted in more newsmen being available later to write correspondence from the army.

Additionally, the New Orleans press of the 1840s was among the best in the country, and the Mexican War was a running story of great interest to it. As a result, the New Orleans papers quickly assumed the leadership in coverage of the war and never relinquished that leadership. Nine of the 11 principal correspondents during the war represented the New Orleans press, and six of the 11 represented one paper, the Picayune. Because of the basic bias of the New Orleans papers, much of the coverage they printed was anti-Mexican, pro-expansionist, pro-Manifest Destiny and pro-American army. This emphasis, pervasive throughout the war, was given wide circulation throughout the rest of the American press because of the tradition of reprinting the accounts of the "exchanges."

Regarding the correspondents, the first important observation regarding them is the number involved. Long before William Howard Russell of the London Times was receiving credit for being the world's first war correspondent, 11 American reporters were in Mexico carrying out that role. When the large number of "occasional correspondents" and "letter writers" are added to this, the total number of people sending news reports during the Mexican War becomes quite sizeable. Although the general journalism histories cite only one major reporter during the war -- George Wilkins Kendall of the Picayune -- there are at least 11 who carried the title and status of "special correspondent" at various times. In addition to Kendall, the Picayune employed C.M. Haile, D. Scully, F.A. Lumsden, John E. Durivage and Charles Callahan to specifically carry out the function of reporting the war's events. In addition, the Delta used James L. Freaner and "Captain" George Tobin; John N. Peoples worked for the Delta and later the New Orleans Crescent, William C. Tobey corresponded with the Philadelphia North American, and John Warland wrote for the Boston Atlas.

Of these, Kendall is by far the most important. His national reputation and status with the army leadership, combined with his reporting ability and energy and innovative skills in setting up express systems, made his performance the most extensive and influential. Kendall's performance was not only a matter of luck, however. His long experience in covering Mexican



affairs, his first-hand knowledge of Mexico and prevailing Mexican attitudes, his understanding of Mexican politics and its military and political leaders, all gave depth and value to what he wrote from the scene. His writing style was not necessarily the best of the reporters involved in the war, but his overall reporting, and his ability to analyze events, were stronger. When these factors are added to the weight given to his articles by the nation's press and public, they make his body of work the most influential and important of the war. Even the issue of his accuracy, which was questioned in the closing months of the fighting, grew from political rather than journalistic roots. The arguments raised against him by the Boston Post and the Washington Union stemmed from political comments (or the lack of them) regarding politically-appointed officers, or criticism of the Administration's war effort. It would take a much more extensive study than this one to determine exactly how accurate Kendall's reporting was in comparison to the known historical record, but from the comments of the Mexican War press, subsequent historians of the Mexican War, and the findings of the present study, he was generally correct in his observations.

Freaner's work may be seen as second in importance, but not necessarily a close second. The Delta attempted to match the Picayune's reporting efforts, but it did not reach the level of a serious competitor until the later stages of the war. Kendall's newspaper experience, his experience with express systems, and

his ability to organize a network of reliable correspondents, gave the Picayune an edge it never relinquished. At best, the Delta pulled even from August, 1847 on, but not until the fighting was at an end and Kendall was ready to depart. Frenner, however, did become an important correspondent from Summer, 1847 on, and as the fighting reached its final states the pseudonym "Mustang" was known nationally. There appears to have been a political explanation for some of his popularity — the Democratic papers preferring the account of a correspondent from a Democratic newspaper, in this case the Delta. As the political attacks against the pro-Whig Kendall increased, the popularity of the pro-Democratic Frenner also increased with a segment of the nation's press. A close reading of the accounts of Kendall and Frenner, however, discloses little of the overt political bias of which they were suspected. Most of the newspaper charges of bias centered on one general in particular, Major General Gideon Pillow, President Polk's former law partner. As events proved, neither Kendall nor Frenner thought much of Pillow's abilities, and there is little in the historical record which indicates any of the correspondents or contemporary military leaders thought much of Pillow's ability or performance.

Peoples and Haile also must be considered as among the most important and influential correspondents during the war. Peoples' contribution is quite special. He was important as a correspondent for the Delta and the Crescent, but his greater contribution came from his ability to establish new papers in

the areas occupied by the army. Although this latter function often was intended to provide propaganda for the army, there was a great deal of news reporting mixed in with Peoples' official reports. The newspapers he established in Mexico were widely quoted in the American press, giving wide circulation to his work.

Haile's performance is somewhat unique, too. As a former West Point cadet he was personally familiar with the personnel and tactics of the American army. Much of this knowledge is reflected in his reporting, and his battle accounts, though limited to Monterrey and Vera Cruz, are highly detailed and analytical from the standpoint of military performance. He also was a writer of exceptional ability, inventing the character of "Pardon Jones," and writing humorous, lightly satirical letters from the camps about the volunteers and their performance.

As a composite, the reporters of the Mexican War are an interesting group. Except for Kendall and Lumsden, who were experienced newspaper owners just turning 40, the correspondents were remarkably young. All the others were in their 20s (or appear to be from the available evidence). A number of them — Callahan, Scully, Frenner and Peoples for example—were setting out for the first time to "see the elephant," in the language of the 1840s. A desire for adventure, excitement and new experiences is reflected in much of their writing. Whether they achieved their goals one can only speculate, but the comment of Peoples that after the Mexican War experience "all things seem ordinary,"

appears to reflect their thinking. As a group, they were all experienced newsmen prior to the start of the war. Scully, Peoples and Callahan were printers; Haile, Freaner, Tobey, Tobin and Warland had worked as reporters or editors; Durivage was a journalist turned actor-playright; Kendall and Lumsden had been in journalism for more than 15 years.

In one form or other all were close to the journalism of the day, and in an age when printers and reporters often had to inter-change their roles, it was easy for them to assume the new and undefined role of army correspondent. There is little evidence, however, that they had a self perception that they were professional war correspondents (or a sense of professionalism, in other words). Kendall, Haile and Freaner came closest to this role, but even in their cases each showed little hesitation to switch to another role when the occasion rose: Kendall quickly leaving the army to return home and then go on to Europe to prepare a book about the war; Freaner dropping his assignment as correspondent for the Delta to become a government courier and later a government agent for property sales at Vera Cruz; Haile readily accepting the officer's commission. It was a time too, when a correspondent's role was not viewed as being entirely separate from the role of the military. More often than not the writers assisted key officers during the battles, rather than standing off and taking a more detached view of events. There were some instances of this, but it does not appear to have come

into general acceptance until the Civil War period. When the fighting was over, though, the correspondents quickly reverted to their reporting function, and generally made an all out effort to be "first with the news."

Looking at the war as a whole, the performance of the press needs to be viewed at two levels. On a broader scale, that of the national level, the performance of the press needs to be viewed as integrated into the mainstream of journalism history. The Mexican War was, in effect, a running story. It was perfectly suited to the news requirements and the journalistic ability and philosophy of the penny press. The leading penny press papers responded to the opportunity presented by the war, met the public's need for news of it, and appear to have emerged stronger than ever from the 1846-1848 period.

In terms of the war's reporting, it is a bit more difficult to assess. There is not much history of reporting prior to the war, or afterwards. There is little doubt, however, that the reporters who went to Mexico became the prime source of information for the general American public, and as such contributed to the understanding, attitudes and support for the distant conflict.

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